May 2026, revised and expanded October 2026

ルノワールのジャポニスム

Renoir's Japonisme: In the Frosting and Filling of his Art

From 'Kogei' Aesthetics to an Implicit Philosophy of 'Wa'

Yasutaka Aoyama
The Japonisme Museum, Kyoto

"Old Corot opened our eyes to the beauty of the Loing, which is a river like any other;
and I am sure that the Japanese landscape is no more beautiful than other landscapes.
But the point is that Japanese painters knew how to bring out their hidden treasure."

Auguste Renoir speaking to his son, in *Renoir, My Father* by Jean Renoir

Auguste Renoir, Still Life with Bouquet, 1871, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

The above painting by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) was the frontispiece for a landmark 1975 exhibition in Cleveland, Ohio. Writing for *The New York Times*, John Russell, chief art critic for the paper observed:

> "At the very beginning of 'Japonisme,' the exhibition that has drawn large and conspicuously attentive crowds to the Cleveland Museum of Art, there is a painting by Renoir that brings most visitors to a halt. It is dated 1871 and is quite unlike most people's idea of Renoir. The amiable hedonist of the female nudes is not in evidence. In his place is a man who is making an inventory of the objects he likes best. The painting is not so much built up as added to, and makes it clear that, at that moment in Renoir's career there were two sides to his creative personality a European side and Japanese side." ('On Art: Japonisme Stirring Cleveland', *The New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1975)

—A "*Japanese side*" to Renoir's creativity—this was an assertion perhaps more easily made then than it is today. For those were the days of a "Japonisme Renaissance"—a resurgence of interest in things Japanese from origami to judo, particularly in the United States. This was due in no small part to the post-WWII US occupation of Japan, and thus close encounter with Japanese culture, a revival that would continue well into the 1970s. Such ideas were not met with the resistance they would encounter in the 21st century, an age presumably more enlightened.

The New York Times art critic then finds symbols of an East-West interaction within the painting, whose layout also reveals a Japanese compositional approach:

> "A dark print in a dark frame stands for Europe, in this context, together with two dusky old books in leather bindings and a large bouquet of flowers wrapped in white paper. In contrast to all this, Renoir included a Japanese fan and a Japanese pot—objects that, by their fresh, bright and stylized color, make quite a different impression. Renoir set all this on canvas not in a formal European way, but rather as Hokusai laid out his images in the 'Manga,' a 15 volume sourcebook of images in woodcut, which had been current in Paris since the eighteen-fifties." (Ibid.)

The accompanying text to the exhibition, *Japonisme: Japanese influence on French Art, 1854-1910* (Gabriel P. Weisberg, et al., Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), was a milestone in japonisme scholarship itself (henceforth 'japonisme' will be in lowercase as an influence upon art styles, capitalized only when meant as a self-conscious art movement). In one of the book's key chapters, 'Japanese Influence on French Painting 1854-1910', Gerald Needham, whose focus on 19th century French art includes influential work on Realism and Orientalism, observed regarding the painting:

> "The Renoir painting Still Life with Bouquet, 1871, shows how the color of a Japanese fan can set the tone for a whole painting. It also illustrates the importance of fans and prints in studios and homes of French artists, for Monet was not the only painter to come under this influence." (1975: 118)

Renoir was no exception—Japanese motifs are found in his works throughout his long career. And as will be plain to see, their role was not merely one of added exotic interest. His kimono-clad 'Madame Hériot' (1882, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Hériot is often confused with 'Henriot', a frequent sitter of Renoir's portraits), below, was the kind of piece every Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painter produced, almost as if a ritual tribute to the new age of art with which Japan was strongly associated. Likewise for the subject, to have a portrait done in kimono was a mark of sophistication for a woman who fancied herself an aesthete, becoming a custom of sorts for the cultural elite well into the 20th century.

The Dual Kogei Aesthetic

But what merits our attention is not just the appearance of Japanese symbolism in Renoir's paintings. Such symbols also hint at a source for a fundamental characteristic of Renoir's artistry—his sensibility towards color, tone, and texture. It is this aspect of his work that shares an aesthetic with Japanese artisanal crafts called 'kogei', such as textiles, porcelains, and fans.

To elaborate, consider that on one hand, his paintings possess a quality not unlike the rich colors of a kimono; brightly contrasting colors with a silky or fine porcelain 'Kakiemon-like' delicacy and sheen. Simultaneously, on the other hand, there is a more subdued and pastel-like aspect, a fading and spreading of color—not so unlike a typical Japanese sensu (radiating and folding fan) or uchiwa (flat and fixed fan) design often done in 'tomei sui-sai' (diluted watercolor/wash), allowing light to pass through it, and exceedingly popular in Europe at the time. The sensu to the left, in 'Girl with Fan' (c. 1881, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg), whether Japanese or otherwise, serves to aptly illustrate the characteristics of the Japanese fans in question, and demonstrates the contrast with the bright hues and porcelain-like luster of Madame Hériot's kimono.

Girl with Fan, c. 1881, Hermitage

Madame Hériot, 1882, Hamburger Kunsthalle

Detail of Still Life with Bouquet, 1871, MFAH

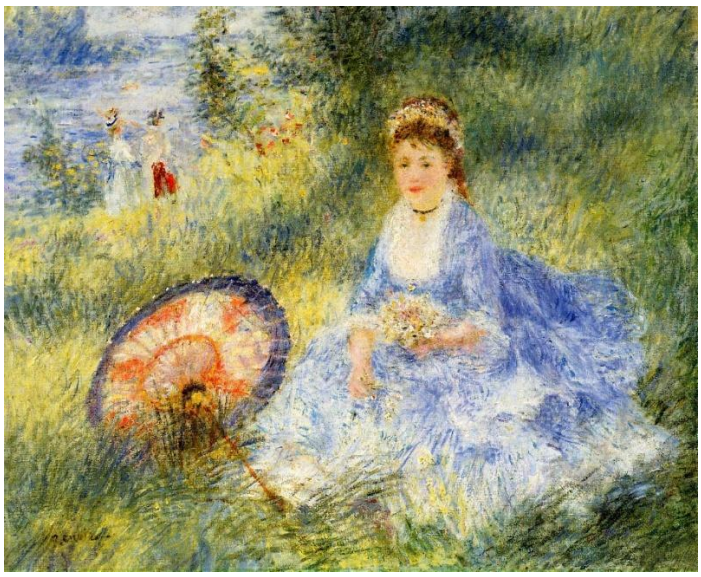
And now looking once more at the first painting, focusing on the fan and the vase, we see it quite succinctly encapsulates those two facets of his japonisme (the vase is sometimes identified as Chinese though it is very much in the 'Nanban' themed old Imari style, often in thickly and brusquely applied color dominated by red, blue and black—see Appendix).

The luxuriant combination of those two chromatic qualities, one earthy and diffused as in fan painting, and one highly reflective of light and silken as in ceramic surfaces—characterizes much of Renoir's work. They also, not coincidentally, are related to the two crafts on which he spent his formative years, first in porcelain décor for Lévy-Frères, and then in decorative painting with his own elder brother, Henri. Oshima Seiji, an early researcher of primary sources on japonisme (past director of the Setagaya Art Museum), in his *Japonisme — Impressionism, Ukiyo-e, and their Milieu* (ジャポニスム — 印象派と浮世絵の周辺, 1992), devotes a whole chapter to Renoir, in which he suggests that having worked in a ceramic factory, and later painting specifically sensu-type fans, he was most likely to have been in a position where he could acquire at least some knowledge of Oriental art (1992: 188).

While this period of Renoir's life is often passed over as a time of primarily Rococo style influence, the fact that he spent a good number of years, from the ages of thirteen to seventeen or so in porcelain design, and afterwards a few more for his brother engaged in fan painting and other decorative work, must have left an indelible impression upon his aesthetic sensibilities. The Rococo style, despite its image of being an insulated European aristocratic phenomenon, especially ornamental motifs, was in no small way a product of what is usually called 'chinoiserie'—but which in reality was in good part formed by a 'japonaiserie' of Imari porcelain, folding fans, urushi (lacquer) ware, and kimonos. These were sought after by royal courts and aristocratic families for their distinctive design and chromatic qualities, differing from the Chinese and recognized as such, consciously imitated and incorporated into European decorative arts by porcelain designers and ébénistes (cabinetmakers). Indeed, that influence spread to painting as well, something in the past which could be stated matter of factly, as did English Impressionist painter and art theorist Wynford Dewhurst in his pioneering *Impressionist Painting: Its Genesis and Development* (1904), the first critical history of the movement to be published in English: "Boucher, and, later, Fragonard were influenced by that Japanese art which was to take such a prominent place in the movement of a hundred years later." (1904: 2)

Furthermore, porcelain and fan design in Renoir's early days was not immune to the wave of Japanese crafts entering Europe from the 1850s onward. That is to say, the crafts Renoir was engaged in, with a strong Rococo character, were intrinsically connected to the chromatic aesthetics of the Far East from their beginnings, and in that sense an aspect of Eastern aesthetic sensibility was inevitably absorbed by Renoir to at least some extent, which moreover converged with the renewed influence of Japanese art in the 19th century. And it is worth recalling that the 19th century japonisme of ceramics started *before* that of Impressionist painting as a self-conscious movement. The Service Rousseau, just one example of Japan-inspired tableware early on, with images from Hokusai's *Manga*, was manufactured by Lebeuf, Millet et Cie in 1866 and displayed at the Paris Exposition of 1867—designed by that foremost of Japonistes, Félix Bracquemond.

Woman with a Fan, c. 1879, Clark Art Institute



Young Woman with a Japanese Umbrella, 1876, private collection, Wikimedia Commons

Renoir's 'Woman (or previously Girl) with a Fan' (c. 1879, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA), above left, once again reflects the aesthetic combination of qualities we have associated with the fan vs. the vase, or here chrysanthemums. The woman holds an uchiwa, done in the sui-sai style; in contrast to it, a radiant profusion of Japanese chrysanthemums reaches above her—flowers that were becoming all the rage in Europe, thanks to their vibrant colors and luxuriant forms. These attributes of the flower were not an accidental result of nature, but cultivated over the centuries to be so, selectively bred and carefully crafted, if you will, much like the ceramic arts.

John House, Emeritus Professor at The Courtauld Institute in London, well-regarded scholar of 19th century French art and curator of a number of Renoir exhibitions, in his *Renoir: Master Impressionist* (1994), after acknowledging the fan "overtly evokes the fashionable vogue for Japanese decorative arts", goes on to suggest this was not all that was Japanese about it, saying:

> "However, composition of the picture, as well, may reflect the impact of Japanese art on Renoir, with its asymmetrical emphases and its strongly emphasized surface patterning." (1994: 80)

Certainly, the dividing up of the backdrop into highly contrastive zones, and/or placing ornamental features above the subject to one side, was a standard format in ukiyo-e, i.e., Japanese woodblock prints. Monet's collection of ukiyo-e at Giverny contains several such prints, among them Utagawa Kuniyoshi's 'Septembre, estampe de la suite *Les Cinq Festivals*' (1843-47, 五節句 長月, in *Les Estampes japonaises de Monet à Giverny, Beaux Arts Magazine*, Feb. 2000: 31), which features on the upper right side, a large blue and white porcelain planter with rich red and yellow chrysanthemums reaching upward, above a woman in a brilliantly patterned (with flying geese) kimono, while the upper left side of the picture is filled with writing in a vertical format dispersed over the space. And though not in this Kuniyoshi print, often ukiyo-e bust portraits situate the subject lower in the overall frame of the picture, as in 'Woman with a Fan', unusual in Western portraiture. But we will reserve further discussion of compositional qualities for later.

On the right of 'Woman with a Fan' is Renoir's 'Young Woman with a Japanese Umbrella' (1876, private collection), and this too, seems to reflect the same combination of a bright ceramic along with the subdued diffusion of painted paper craft. The Japanese umbrella, constructed of oil-coated paper, designed with colored and open, uncolored spaces, allows light to pass through and illuminate the orange pigment; while the woman's blue and white dress possesses a fineness and brilliance that reminds one of classic 'blue-and-white' china, from China or Japan.

A Girl gathering Flowers, c. 1872-74, Clark Art Institute

Dance in the Country, 1883, Orsay

Another painting that invites comparison to the 'Young Woman with a Japanese Umbrella' is 'A Girl (or Woman) gathering Flowers' (c. 1872-74, Clark Art Institute), shown above. John House, speaking in regard to the preoccupation with the effects of open-air light and color in the artist's 1882 solo exhibition, focuses upon this piece, which also depicts what is likely a Japanese parasol:

> "… The young woman stands stiffly amid a flowery meadow, a bunch of flowers in her hand and her fashionable Japanese-style parasol at her feet; her costume shows that she is a parisienne, while the awkwardness of her stance suggests that she feels ill at ease amid the lavish natural growth of the meadow."
>
> (*Renoir Landscapes: 1865-1883,* The National Gallery, London, 2007: 15)

The parasol, probably the same one used in 'Young Woman with a Japanese Umbrella', with its splotches of orange and blue rim, is not just a prop for added exotic interest; it is a critical element in creating the kind of color balance and variety in open-air light Renoir was aiming for, in a picture that would otherwise become rather subdued—almost monotonous—without it. That it is a Japanese-type parasol, not an opaque European one, with its peculiar translucent quality, passing light and creating a natural luminosity and harmony of color, is what makes it a truly apropos element in creating the total, desired effect of the picture. The Japanese parasol is emblematic, a perfect symbol, possibly even inspirational of Renoir's ideal synthesis of light and color. Even as a very small element in a painting, such as in his 'Woman with a Parasol in a Garden' (1875, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid), assuming it is a Japanese or at least a Japanese-type parasol—given its luminous quality, size, and seemingly flat, spreading form (distinguishable from, for instance, the European-style pink parasol of 'Woman with Parasol and Small Child on a Sunlit Hillside', 1873, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)—it plays an indispensable role in defining the work, without which the human element, focal point, and depth would be lost within the luxuriant growth, reducing it to a near decorative mass.

Something comparable might be said of the sensu fan in Renoir's iconic 'Dance in the Country' (1883, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), shown next to the 'Girl gathering Flowers'. It also is of paramount importance in defining the character of the picture. Despite its blurred aspect, the fan, held by his future wife, Aline Charigot, is most likely Japanese in manufacture given its compositional layout and general design, and confirms what we have discussed concerning Renoir's expression of the 'kogei aesthetic'. The particular popularity of this painting, among his images of dancing couples, is of course attributable to multiple aspects of its charm, but no doubt one of them, and something that makes the image stand out so, is the strongly felt presence of the fan. The fan provides the 'paper kogei chromatics' contrasting with the figure of Aline and her dress, which provides the fine, porcelain-like sheen in the balancing act of the two qualities.

Taking a look at a few other examples of his fans, it appears they too reflect 'japonisant' aesthetic qualities. Renoir's 'A Loge at the Théâtre des Variétés' (1898, private collection, not shown), contains not only a fan, though inconspicuously, of the type in 'Dance in the Country', but also exemplifies the kind of boldness in composition, cropping, and contrasts of scale found in Japanese prints. Also of interest is 'A Lady with a Fan' (1906, private collection, image Wikimedia Commons), a painting of a young woman alluringly attired in a diaphanous dress who hardly seems to have a connection with Japan; except that her fan emits the luster of a stick and guard lacquered decorative-type sensu, often surfaced with combinations of gold or silver mixed with rich greens, purples, reds, and the like, to produce a similar subtle glow.

Detail of A Lady with a Fan, 1906, private collection

Detail of Dance in the Country, 1883, Orsay

Whatever its actual manufacture, European, Chinese, or Japanese, it is emulative of Japanese models, if only indirectly, for the Rococo-style folding fan is an evolution from the sensu or 'ogi' (another, older name for it, encompassing the larger type) coming from Japan, or from Chinese versions of it. On this point, as in the case with Japanese innovations in any age, the air needs to be cleared a little. One of the oldest folding fans extant is the Toji Temple fan of 877; folding fans were brought as gifts to the Chinese court by the Japanese monk Chonen in 986; later they would be highly sought after in Ming-era China, as they would be when they reached Europe, primarily via Portugal and Spain in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and afterwards via Holland. More than half a millennium before they appear in Spanish artworks, when the Iberian peninsula was under Moorish rule, they adorned Yamato-e paintings of the 11th and 12th centuries during the Heian period (on the origins of the folding fan, including Chinese historical documentation and modern scholarship, see '18th Century Japonisme' at japonisme.org). That being said, we can now move ahead.

Of greater interest in our study of Japanese artistic influences than the aforesaid paintings, is the following 'Portrait of Madame Hartmann' (1874, Musée d'Orsay), where the fan is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Here too, the sensu fan she holds reveals the translucent, desaturated, ethereal quality we have been speaking of, opposed to the deep, highly reflective sheen of her black dress. But there is much more to consider. Note first the pose of Madame Hartmann, then the composition of the bulky form of the dress—with its heavy, complex folds—and how it fills much of the canvas. Observe the finely distributed gradations of color tone. Add to that its muffled hues and surprisingly restrained elegance for Renoir, i.e., its 'shibui' chromatics emphasizing black and light blue, with some brownish red. All this suggests the possible influence of 'aizuri-e' (藍摺絵 – Japanese characters will be included for clarification in certain cases), literally 'blue printed pictures' where the picture is primarily in a blue ink thinned to varying tones. A typical example is Keisai Eisen's 'Kashiku of the Tsuruya' (1830s, MFA Boston), shown alongside Madame Hartmann.

Various aspects of the ukiyo-e aizuri style appear to have been subtly transformed in Renoir's picture. Nevertheless, we can still make out the correspondences: not only of the central subject, her pose and massing of volumes and angles, but even the existence of a partially hidden, smaller and younger secondary subject. In Renoir it is the girl playing the piano hidden by the piano and cropped by the left edge of the frame so that we see only her face and some of her white dress; in Eisen it is the girl mostly hidden within the folds of the kimono. In both cases, they may go unnoticed at first glance. This is a clear indication that Renoir is conscious of Japanese print compositions. Manet used the same technique in his 'Nana' (1877, Hamburger Kunsthalle), which even John Rewald asserts in his *The History of Impressionism* was a "device borrowed from Japanese prints" (1973: 403).

Renoir, Portrait of Madame Hartmann, 1874, Orsay

Eisen, Kashiku of the Tsuruya, 1830s, MFA Boston

The wall in Renoir with its patterned, mixed tones of blue and an off-white (like that of woodblock prints) is an artful inversion of the aizuri chromatic to the background, while the black mass of the dress provides the opposing uniformity which in the aizuri-e is provided by the surrounding void. In other words, the chromatic intricacy (dress) vs. chromatic uniformity (backdrop) is reversed—or rather we should say mixed, for Madame Hartmann's dress, while monochrome, maintains the level of complexity of volume, line, and tone gradations of an aizuri-e. Renoir has reformulated it with restraint in a typically French bourgeois setting, fully assimilating and synthesizing the aizuri aesthetic with that of his own.

As an added observation, the overall 'shibui' quality of the picture also recalls 'surimono'—privately commissioned, limited edition woodblock prints. These employed luxury materials as metallic dust combined with fine embossing, techniques shared with certain high quality nishiki-e (full color prints like a silk 'brocade') such as those by Sharaku, on which were applied one or a combination of 'gofun' (shell powder), 'enpaku' (white lead), or 'kira' (mica dust 雲母), producing subtle, rich mattes to dark, shimmering lusters as in Madame Hartmann's dress.

If one is observant, a good number of Japanese 'clues' can be found in Renoir's paintings. They at times reflect his personal artistic choice, or at other times simply the prevalence of Japanese art and crafts to be found in French homes at the time. In either case, the stimulus of Japanese art was an inescapable reality, whether in the homes of his intimate friends and Japanophiles, such as the Monets, leading to works such as his 'Portrait of Madame Monet Reading' (c. 1874, Clark Art Institute), and 'Woman on a Staircase' (c. 1876, Hermitage), or when deciding to paint his own son holding a Japanese sensu fan, as in 'Coco à l'éventail japonais' (1906, private collection). —A painting whose title, by the way, and others by Renoir like it, often undergo a 'genericization' in English, losing the clear cultural identifications present in the original French.

Detail of Madame Monet Reading, 1874
Clark Art Institute

Detail of Coco à l'éventail japonais, 1906
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Detail of Woman on a Staircase, c.1876
Hermitage

Renoir clearly associated the fan designs in his paintings with Japan. As he wrote in his unpublished manifesto on art, *Grammar of Art* (or just *Grammar*, 1883-84), into which he poured his core convictions, an artist should learn from nature directly rather than relying on existing models if one wished to produce things of true beauty, and he often raised the example of Japan to illustrate this, including its fans:

> "The Japanese have certainly taken their ~~fans~~ [crossed out] screens from the wing of a butterfly, otherwise they would have made them round or oval." (paragraph 142, in Herbert, 2000: 150, annotation bracketed)

Though conjectural, perhaps he crossed out the word "fan" (éventail) and substituted "screen" (écran, as in écran à main) to include the uchiwa style fixed fan, which comes in organic shapes of its own, neither perfectly round nor oval; though the spreadable sensu fan seems also to correspond to one side of a butterfly's wings. In any event, he found Japanese fans exemplary as a case of design done the right way—that is directly from, and in harmony with, Nature. This notion of the artist being true to and one with Nature, in short, a conception of intrinsic and holistic harmony, evokes the Japanese expression 'Wa' (和), which at the same time, quite in line with Renoir's thinking, signifies in the Japanese language something being characteristically Japanese—such as in 'wafu' (和風).

The Misconstrued Artist and his 'Subdued' Works

Thus, while Renoir advocated artistic production from direct observation of nature in the Japanese manner, at the same time, it has been suggested there was another aspect of his awareness of Japan that seeped in from his circle of artist friends and patrons such as the Charpentiers or Henri Cernuschi, or writers and critics such as Philippe Burty, Théodore Duret, and Théophile Gautier, who were all ardent Japanophiles, veritably at the very forefront of Japonisme. Even Gautier's daughter, Judith, whom Renoir may have had a romantic interest in, was no less enamored of Japan: "Renoir probably was in love with this passionate admirer of Japan and Wagner", according to the late Sophie Monneret, that prolific scholar of Impressionism at the École du Louvre, as she relates in her *Renoir* (1990: 10). Judith Gautier was a central figure in literary japonisme, publishing *L'Usurpateur* in 1875, a tale of samurai heroes set in feudal Japan, followed by other works including *Poëmes de la libellule* in 1885, a translation of tanka poems in collaboration with the Marquis Saionji Kinmochi, which has been called "a remarkable feat of versification" by William L. Schwartz at Stanford University's then burgeoning Department of Romanic Languages, in *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature 1800–1925* (1927: 53).

It was this omnipresent fascination with Japan among cultural elites that was to become a widespread bourgeois fad which may have aroused in Renoir a counter-reaction to it, even if Japanese art was instructive for him. As a spirited individualist, he disliked any kind of unquestioning infatuation, just as he found a blind adulation of Greek ideals of beauty

to be nonsense. There are a few anecdotes that form the basis of the argument against Japanese influence on Renoir, and we should first address them before going any further. François Fosca, who otherwise was an able and accomplished scholar, in his *Renoir* (1969), is typical in his acritical acceptance of what is essentially one man's personal, unverifiable recollection about Renoir's beliefs:

> "...it is worth remarking that he [Renoir] never shared the passion for Japanese art so general about 1865. According to himself, he was put off it by Madame Charpentier's rooms, which she had filled with *japonaiseries*, as was currently fashionable. 'During the exhibition of 1889, my friend Burty took me to see some Japanese prints. I won't deny that there were some very fine things there; but when I came out of the gallery I saw a Louis XIV chair upholstered in a simple little bit of tapestry, and there couldn't have been anything more simple, I would have embraced that chair.'
>
> On another occasion, when Vollard asked him if the Impressionists had been influenced by Japanese prints, he replied: 'Unfortunately yes, at first. Japanese prints are certainly very interesting, as Japanese prints—in other words, as long as they stay in Japan. A people should not appropriate what belongs to another race; in so doing, they are apt to make stupid mistakes. There would soon be a kind of universal art, without any individual characteristics. I once thanked a critic who had written that I belonged unmistakably to the French school. "And if I am pleased to belong to the French school," I told him, "it is not because I wish to assert its superiority over all other schools, but because, since I am a Frenchman, I should belong to my own country." ' " (Fosca, 1969: 272)

These tidbits, circulating much like the apocryphal story of Hokusai discovered as wrapping paper (when actually it was a booklet, according to Bracquemond, included in the package, probably as an added gift by the seller), are the gist of the argument provided by the naysayers, drawn from the art dealer Ambroise Vollard. Yet as Ronald Pickvance points out, Vollard's "reported conversations with the artist are not always to be trusted" (Pickvance, 'Monet and Renoir in the mid-1870s', *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium*, 1980: 159). Robert L. Herbert, in his invaluable study of Renoir's own writings (*Nature's Workshop: Renoir's Writings on the Decorative Arts,* Yale, 2000), verified that, although Vollard "published sentences as though Renoir were speaking directly to him", these were taken from certain specific paragraphs from a draft of Renoir's, and that "Vollard interlarded them with supposed questions of his own." (2000: 158) To put it bluntly, he literally made-up portions of his conversations with Renoir, incorporating some of the artist's writings, using a cut and paste approach.

Interestingly, Vollard also records that Renoir "knew Hayashi Tadamasa very well" (in Pickvance, 1980: 169)—Hayashi being an instrumental figure in introducing and explaining Japanese art to European critics, collectors, and artists. But the idea of Renoir spending time with Hayashi seems to be at odds with his supposed disdain for Japanese art.

Furthermore, the questions Vollard supposedly asked Renoir show a blatant priming for a negative response: "Didn't the Impressionists allow themselves to be too much influenced by foreign schools? Japanese art, for instance?" (Vollard, *Renoir: An Intimate Record*, 1925, 1990: 28) In a limited search of the art dealer's writings and biographical material, nowhere has this author found a positive comment on anything Japanese, except for a light remark about Okakura Kakuzo's *The Book of Tea,* and that in the bibliography of his Renoir memoir. Might it be that what he portrays as Renoir's opinion about Japan was culled and magnified from a more nuanced attitude, and is rather a reflection—a classic case of projection—of his own personal opinions?

Instead we should listen to Renoir himself—what he himself wrote for his contemporaries and for posterity. While he abhorred mindless imitation of others, he felt Japan's example was of paramount importance. In his *Grammar* (1883-1884), which was "Dedicated to all those who love art and those who wish to make a career out of it", he wrote:

> "What's necessary is to turn our attention to it in order to emulate it, but certainly not to do any copying. You need to go and see beautiful Japanese things and ask yourself why they are beautiful. Use the same means to do everything else." (paragraph 23, in Herbert, 2000: 127)

This point is emphasized repeatedly:

> "We must do as the Japanese: love and copy nature without ceasing, but with our French eye, in order to equal their strength by the same means, the only right ones, without resembling them in any way." (paragraph 45, in Herbert, 2000: 132)

In his letters too, we receive a different impression, for there are no open disavowals of interest in Japanese art, and some indications of the opposite. Quite eye-opening is a letter Renoir sent to Philippe Burty, the coiner of the term "Japonisme", kept at the Louvre's Département des Arts graphiques, recently excavated by Colin B. Bailey, British art historian with a focus on Renoir, and Director of the Morgan Library & Museum in New York City:

> "In an undated (and unpublished) letter to his friend Philippe Burty, likely written in mid-April 1874, Renoir claimed that while he would have liked to chat with him about Japonisme, 'je ne suis pas encore complètement débrouillé avec cet accrochage compliqué.' The letter is in the Musée du Louvre." ('A Daring Departure' *The New York Review of Books,* 27 Feb. 2025, footnote 5)

While concerned with the Impressionist installation he was overseeing at the time, Japonisme was also something that loomed in his thoughts, that he had an interest in, and wished to know more about from at least the mid-1870s. This may rightly be deemed a 'far cry' from the way Vollard portrays it. We will hear more from Renoir on Japan later; in the meantime, the above should suffice for the reader to take Vollard's version of things with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, biographies of Renoir that forego serious consideration of Japanese influence side step the implications of Renoir's own writings, and instead amplify Vollard's. But frankly, any scholarly position built substantially on the art dealer's reported conversations may be said to rest on precarious foundations.

There are though, certain authors, perhaps sensing the truth, though not necessarily comfortable with it, that offer a token example of that influence. The American painter and writer Walter Pach, who had met Renoir in person—a pivotal figure in introducing modern art to the American public—studied under artists known for their use of Japanese motifs, as Robert Henri (e.g., portraits of Edna Smith) and William Merritt Chase (likewise numerous portraits in kimono). Thus he must have been well aware of the impact of japonisme. In his book *Renoir* (1950), Pach mentions Japanese art once, at the end of his commentary on 'Two Little Circus Girls', now better known as 'Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando' (1879, Art Institute of Chicago), concluding cryptically:

> "Much of the planning of this picture is due to the influence of Japanese art, which in the seventies [1870s] was the great catalyst to the art of the Western world." (*Renoir*, 1950, edition 1983: 62)

If that be the case, his discussion of it, contained in that one sentence, must be called extraordinarily brief. It hardly makes sense that if some major artistic movement did have an effect on a painter, it would appear only in a single piece. No one is a Japoniste, or for that matter, an Orientalist or Romanticist for a day. The German art historian-writer Bruno F. Schneider, in his *Renoir* (1958), admits two examples, though somewhat begrudgingly, where Japanese woodblock prints were a transformative factor for the artist's paintings:

> "The Lady with Veil [c. 1875-76, Orsay] too differs as far as colour is concerned, from the work of previous years. The delicate pastel shades hardly recall the past at all, and the plane composition of the picture, the conspicuous emptiness of the right half, point rather to Japanese influences, which indeed was rife everywhere after the World Exhibition in Paris in 1867, with its Oriental pavilions. … Renoir himself did not like the subtle colour harmonies of the Japanese woodcuts, but that does not exclude the possibility that in his new uncertainty he borrowed his pastel shades from the Japanese." (1958: 66)

The Lady with Veil, c. 1875-76, Orsay

Dance in the City, 1883, Orsay

Henriette Henriot, 1876, Oskar Reinhart

Schneider identifies a related aspect to 'Dance in the City' (1883, Musée d'Orsay):

> "Mural ideas have a stronger effect in this picture, and the economical colouring of the large areas is again influenced by Japanese coloured woodcuts." (1958: 71)

As seen in Madame Hartmann, this 'shibui' aesthetic—a term semantically useful (no less than 'umami' in culinary description, however much tossed about colloquially)—this restraining of color hues, and here the "economical colouring of the large areas" which roughly corresponds to the concept of 'jitsubushi' (地潰し), appears on and off from around 1874 for the next decade or so, in works including, but not limited to, the two above. Actually, around the time he executed the 'Lady with Veil', he produced a host of paintings in a related manner.

His 'Portrait of Henriette Henriot' (1876, Sammlung Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur, Zurich) recalls the japonisme aspects of Manet's 'The Fifer', such as the flattening of the pictorial plane and the treatment of the background. Then there is his 'Woman in Black' (1877, Hermitage) faintly evoking the 'bunjinga' (literati ink-wash picture) style, employing a 'guzumi' (charcoal ink mixed with pigment, 具墨) touch. His 'Young Woman' (1877, Sanno Art Museum, Osaka) is an unusual piece, like a dark apparition ready to join those of Kawanabe Kyosai—an eccentric genius of whimsy (acquainted with the likes of Émile Guimet), or a hunched-over crow by Watanabe Seitei—who would demonstrate his skills at the 1878 Paris world exposition.

While the 'Portrait of Claude Monet' (1875, Musée d'Orsay) depicting Monet in his sunroom "with its Japanese matting and oleander trees in Oriental vases" (C. Bailey, et al., *Renoir's Portraits*, 1997: 138; Monet's 'Mme. Monet Embroidering', 1875, The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, clearly reveals the Far Eastern aura of the room) might remind one of Zen portraiture or that of other sages, next to a tree or bamboo grove in sumi-ink on an old hanging scroll—only that Monet holds a brush instead of the priest's scepter or short staff. This is not such an impossible idea, given the vogue, not only for Japanese art at the time, but the growing interest in Eastern religions, apparent in Schopenhauer's philosophy, Max Mueller's translations, culminating in the publication of Sir Edwin Arnold's popular *Light of Asia* (1879), a sutra-like recounting of the life and philosophy of the Buddha. Buddhist statues were a fixture of mantelpieces in the homes of artists, musicians, and writers of the time, and appear frequently in old photographs. In fact, 'Japonisme and Eastern Thoughts: Religion, Philosophy and Aesthetics 19th-20th century' was the topic of The Society for the Study of Japonisme's 2021 international symposium.

Even Renoir's 'Self-Portrait' (1876, Harvard Art Museums) might be mingled in this discussion, with its background somewhat reminiscent of 'amibokashi' (網ボカシ), a technique using a shading net often in combination with paper cutouts, which produces a mixture of indistinct, broken orthogonal shapes in soft colors. Why as early as 1868 or so, Renoir's 'Landscape, Snow Effect' (c. 1868, private collection) gives an inescapable impression of something Eastern, an aspect of Hiroshige's 'Kanbara: Night Snow' (1833-34, MFA Boston title), or of an ink-wash winter scene done with 'momigami' (揉み紙, literally 'massaged paper')—an intentionally crinkled painting surface, producing a complex, weathered look.

The descriptions above were the result of this author's subjective first impressions, and as such, are not an adamant assertion of influence—but ideas for a novel hypothesis, suggestions for possible avenues of research. In hindsight, as a whole, they seem to evoke 'suiboku-ga'—Eastern ink-wash paintings. Usually mounted on hanging scrolls, they were known generically as 'kakemono'—depicted by Renoir at the Charpentiers' Japanese salon. They were a fixture of imported Japanese goods, along with, but without the fanfare surrounding, ukiyo-e prints. Degas, for one, did several pastels in monotype which distinctly evoke classic Japanese/Chinese suiboku painting, such as 'Cote rocheuse' (c. 1890, Galerie Belvedere, Vienna), which brings to mind the uniquely shaped land bridge 'Ama-no-hashidate' near Kyoto. Three others of unknown date recall 'sansui'—'mountain and water' genre ink-wash pictures: 'Sentier de prairie' (Yale University Art Gallery), 'Paysage avec eau' (L.1038), and 'Paysage' (Brame-Reff 136), introduced in Mabuchi Akiko's 'Hayashi Tadamasa and Degas: Hayashi's Lost Collection of Occidental Art' (*Society for the Study of Japonisme Report 16,* 1996, pp. 20-37).

Geneviève Lacambre, one of France's Honorary General Curators of Heritage, and once chief curator at the Orsay Museum, in the Museum publication, *Musée d'Orsay: Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterpieces* (1984), notes in her discussion of Manet's 'The Fifer' that "In fact he was paying tribute, not only to Spain, but to the unmodulated blacks in the Japanese prints he admired." (1984: 24) If so, Renoir's 'dark' works must be placed in the context of that interest in the "unmodulated blacks" of which Manet was the trendsetter, something Renoir was no doubt fully aware of. Japanese prints of the 18th and early 19th centuries, such as those of Suzuki Harunobu and Kitagawa Utamaro, very popular among European collectors, and despite being called 'nishiki-e' (full color prints, 'brilliant like a silk brocade') were often a combination of black and a limited number of hues in muted tones, such as yellow, orange, and green. Many picture books, which also came over in good numbers, were monochrome, characterized by bold black outlines and 'tsubushi' (fill-ins) in black, Hokusai's being the most famous. The emphasis on black, whether from woodblock prints or hand-painted suiboku-ga, was in one form or another linked to Japanese art.

Now returning to Schneider, who, having acknowledged two instances of what we have seen to be a wider pattern, is nevertheless quick to add: "This Eastern art, however, did not have a lasting influence on Renoir; he only made use of it while he was in search of new creative principles." —Though it would seem that any source, if key in finding "new creative principles", that is a stimulus that is catalytic, should be reckoned as of long-lasting significance.

This naysaying would only worsen towards the end of the 20th century, where the peculiar trend arose that those who denied or minimized the Japanese impact upon Impressionism were best received by publishers and academics. For instance, Anne Distel, in her *Renoir: A Sensuous Vision* (1995), starts Chapter III, "Success and Maturity", with the categorical statement:

> "Of all the Impressionists, Renoir was the least affected by the craze for things Japanese that so strongly marked this generation of artists. Nevertheless, by placing a *cheap* Japanese fan in the hands of his young model (probably the actress Jeanne Samary) in 1881, *for once he gave in* to the *fashion*, painting a 'Japanese Parisian.' " (1995: 61, *italics* added)

Was the fan indeed cheap—a 19th century version of Japanese transistor radios that flooded France in the 1960s? It should be needless to say that the value of true artistic inspiration is not a matter of the pocketbook. Or if she is referring to the artistic quality of the fan, what we have here is a case of unabashed bias, no less than that of her mentor, John Rewald, who in his *The History of Impressionism,* describes ukiyo-e prints as "insipid" (1973: 208). Distel's assertion that Renoir *gave in* to a *fashion*, as if it were a bad habit or the wearing of bellbottoms, and just *once*, is surely false, as we have already repeatedly demonstrated. For Renoir frequently gave in to the Japanese fashion throughout the years, just as Monet did, not only to Japanese fans, but to a host of porcelains, umbrellas, kimonos, and other Japanese crafts. Japanese ukiyo-e prints too, were relatively inexpensive, compared to buying European paintings, perhaps to Distel's satisfaction.

Taking a step back for perspective on attitudes in scholarship, it appears that the idea of Japanese influence upon Renoir was more easily accepted in the 1970s, in line with what we might call a more open minded view of art history, and, for that matter, history in general at the time. That was so in France and Germany, but also in English-speaking countries such as Britain and America. But as time went on, especially from the 1990s onward, the more widely promoted art history surveys or their revised editions, such as those by Gombrich, Janson, Gardner, Rewald, or Thomson, tended to underplay japonisme, despite the growing body of evidence for it—and the connection with specific artists such as Renoir.

Should the reader have any doubts, he need only walk into a major bookstore chain, and what he will probably find, if there is to be one book on Renoir, is the Taschen published *Renoir: Painter of Happiness* (2026) by Gilles Néret—who admires Vollard and, not surprisingly, also offers snide gossip about Japan (e.g., pp. 18 and 273). There is something here that harks back to early 20th century scholarship in its satisfaction in imputing a repulsive monied crassness to a particular culture, something which seems to indicate the condoning of prejudice by major publishing institutions still remains deeply rooted. These considerations are not asides in our discussion of Renoir; for understanding the issue of his japonisme is not simply a question of determining whether it is true—even if it is, there are what we might call unenlightened 'japanoclasts' who do not like the source of it. Rhetorical tactics grew alongside this hardening of attitudes, such as charges of 'pareidolia', particularly when cross-cultural influences were involved, while intra-European similarities were commonly accepted on weaker visual grounds. The reader can be the judge of what will be presented here, and distinguish between 'seeing into things' versus what is a pervasive, persistent pattern across visual examples and text, of a nature beyond coincidence—and heed his own instinct rather than the 'herd instinct'. At the very least, he should not be cowed into rejecting a logical conclusion by its being labeled (by those who would have it otherwise) a hallucinatory affliction. Pareidolia is often nothing more than an underhanded ad hominem argument dressed in a formidable sounding Greek neologism, employed when there are no better means of rebuttal.

Direct and Indirect Transmission

That being said, now with our glasses cleaned, the role of japonisme in Impressionism can be seen more clearly. Impressionism did not "grow like mushrooms" on its own, to borrow a phrase from that associate of Renoir's, Théodore Duret, who observed the trials and tribulations of that art movement as it unfolded before him. Naturally it built upon the artistic traditions of Europe, but critical too, Duret asserted, was the encounter with Japanese art (*Les Peintres impressionnistes,* 1878: 13-14).

We should also distinguish between different types of japonisme influence. That impact was not limited to a direct assimilation of the aesthetic qualities of Japanese artifacts. Renoir was, it does seem, as suggested earlier, also swayed by Japoniste painting by European artists depicting motifs or ideas associated with Japan, such as those by Whistler, but in a 'mutated' form. This seems to be quite clear in 'Rapha Maître' (1871, private collection) shown on the following page. Rapha, while pensively holding a Japanese fan in her hand, is otherwise neither dressed in a Japanese kimono, nor surrounded by Japanese goods as in Whistler's painting, 'Princess from the Land of Porcelain' (1863-65, Freer Gallery, Smithsonian, DC)—and yet there is an affinity that is difficult to deny, a 'family resemblance' of sorts, to borrow a phrase from the philosopher Wittgenstein.

Actually, many of the parallels between Renoir and Whistler are shared with the 'bijinga' (literally 'pictures of beauties') genre of the 'tate-e' ('vertical' or 'upright' picture) type of ukiyo-e, or hand-painting mounted on kakemono—hanging scrolls. The verticality is particularly pronounced in 'hashira-e', meaning 'pillar pictures' which can be hung to decorate even narrow wooden pillars (this format will be discussed further in regards to Renoir's works later). An example by Utagawa Kunimasa (1773–1810) of a kakemono painting, 'Woman Holding a Fan' (1795-1801, MFA Boston), has been placed to the right. The three images—Renoir, Whistler, and Kunimasa—lined up nicely illustrate the 'evolution' of japonisme influence taking place in European art.

Renoir, Rapha Maître, 1871
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Whistler, Princess … Land of Porcelain, 1863-65
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian

Kunimasa, Woman Holding a Fan, 1795-1801
MFA Boston (top margin cropped)

Working our way first from Renoir to Whistler, we see each recognizably Japanese element has been replaced, so to speak, by something different, but that functions in a similar way, with similar effect. Instead of a shimmering silver kimono, hanging heavily in vertical layers, we have a shimmering exotic gold dress, layered horizontally, with sleeves suggestive of kimono sleeves. Both emphasize the slender, flat-chested verticality of the women, with the weight of their dresses spreading on the floor. Despite the light coming from opposite directions, the angle and shadows of the face are not so dissimilar in general aspect, as well as the shadow of darkness in their hearts. And the small delicate hands, only partially visible in both Renoir and Whistler, remind us of the tiny hands in bijinga ever so lightly holding their uchiwa fans, whose designs are often of the same floral style.

The correspondences or substitutions extend beyond the figures themselves. In Renoir's image, a leafy plant with strong stems and large leaves shoots up asymmetrically (possibly a reworking of one of his earliest paintings, and reminiscent of designs in Kitagawa Utamaro's book of plants and insects, *Ehon mushi erami,* 1788), which acts as a naturalistic substitute for the floral designs on the byobu screen in Whistler's picture, whose flowers likewise emphasize the stems. Only with the smaller flowers does Renoir assert a 'French' arrangement. The floor is bare in Renoir, but the wallpaper serves the need for backdrop color and complexity, in place of the carpet and screen in Whistler. At the same time, each picture keeps a certain surface empty: the walls beyond the screen in Whistler and the aforementioned floor in Renoir. Finally, the angularity of the byobu screen is replicated by the angle of the bird cage in Renoir's composition.

Now looking at Whistler's painting in relation to the Kunimasa painting, the transmission of 'genetic' material becomes apparent: the elongated figure and that peculiar slouch, with the outer robe slightly slipping down the shoulder; the thick folded nature of the spreading robes at the floor, with the slight showing of the inner lining; and again the small hands with their delicate manner of holding the fan; in all this in the English artist's attempt to emulate bijinga imagery is recognizable. And though there is none in the Kunimasa example here, byobu screens (and bird cages) are not uncommonly featured in such prints.

Thus, the self-evident resemblance with Japanese imagery is to be found in Whistler, but Renoir is not so far from it in certain respects of his composition that demarcate it from typical Western female portraiture. Those features of Renoir's painting are succinctly described by Paul Joannides, Emeritus Professor of the History of Art at Cambridge:

> "This portrait is unusual in Renoir's early work in the elongation of the figure, the angularity of her draperies, and the wide-angle view, which makes it appear that the subject is about to slide out of the picture. The trellis-work wallpaper, the high wainscotting, and the large birdcage divide the space and seem to confine the sitter; and the flowers that jut into the lower left corner intrude upon her." (*Renoir: Life and Works*, 2000: 32)

These types of spatial tensions or disruptions have always been associated with Impressionist and Post-impressionist japonisme. Indeed, Joannides considers Renoir's painting to be the result of the twin stimulus of Japanese examples and the example of Japan-influenced fellow painters:

> "The inspiration for this organization came from Japanese prints, as the fan clearly indicates, but the general conception and the thick pigment with which the dress is painted are indebted to the work of Edouard Manet (1832-83) and James Whistler (1834-1903), both of whom were fascinated by japonisme." (Ibid.)

That is, Renoir's painting is a case of *direct* and *indirect transmission* of Japanese artistic qualities, from the stimulus of art actually from Japan, and that of art made from a consciousness of it. And to return to our metaphor one last time, japonisme might have been a 'recessive trait' in Renoir, but was still undoubtedly there under the surface. Gerald Needham also suggested that Japanese influence may have been transmitted through the works of his circle of japonisant artist colleagues. Referring to Renoir's intimate friendship with the Monets, Needham observes:

> "The famous La Japonaise, 1876 (Boston Museum of Fine Arts), Monet's painting of his wife wrapped in a spectacular Japanese-appliqued cloth with fans on the wall behind her, is the one fashionable and obvious [Japan influenced] picture that he painted in this period. Renoir, Monet's friend, was sensitive to Japanese color but his compositions are less innovative than Monet's; where we see traces of Japonisme they may have come from the works of his friends rather than directly from the Japanese. An admiration for Japanese art is seen most clearly in the use Renoir made of fans, screens, and silks in his portraits, particularly those of Monet's wife." (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 119)

A less obvious case, but in true japonisme style 'à la Renoir', is 'Camille Monet Reading Le Figaro' (c. 1874, Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon), otherwise known as 'Madam Monet on a Sofa'. Sophie Monneret, who, by the way, was twice awarded the Academie Francaise prize Charles Blanc for her histories on Impressionism, notes in her biography of Renoir:

> "In Madam Monet on a Sofa, small fluid touches are woven together in clear bright tones. Painted in 1872 [sic], the picture is a reference to the craze for Japan that was sweeping Paris (and elsewhere) at the time." (1990: 49)

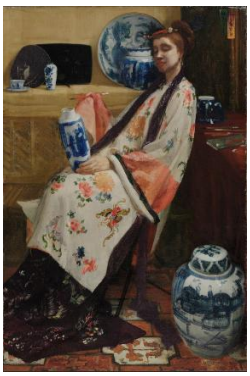
While Francesca Castellani, Associate Professor at Iuav University Venice (History of Contemporary Art), describes it thus in her *Renoir: His Life and Works*:

> "This portrait of Monet's wife is like a Japanese silk-screen, embellished with light-filled touches of color. The composition is solidly structured on horizontals and is animated by unexpected small differences in perspective in the dress, which is flattened against the white divan." (1998: 78)

Despite Madame Monet not specifically wearing one, it is an image that echoes those of James Abbott McNeill Whistler and other paintings of European women in kimonos. But this is exactly Renoir's approach—an absorption of Japanese artistic principles and japonisme themes remade in his own way, usually avoiding a direct transfer of motifs.

Whistler, Purple and Gold, 1864, Smithsonian

Renoir, Camille Monet Reading Le Figaro, c.1874, Gulbenkian



Whistler, Purple and Rose, 1864, PMA

Placed side by side with some of Whistler's well-known paintings, such as 'Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen' (1864, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art), and 'Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks' (1864, Philadelphia Museum of Art), one may sense the connection with Renoir in terms of composition and forms. Except that Renoir has taken a subtler, metaphorical approach, where it is Madame Monet herself, with her blue dress and white sofa, that have been merged into one and transformed implicitly into a 'Lange Leizen' (Lijzen)—Dutch meaning 'Long Ladies'—referring to blue-and-white Chinese porcelain (or Japanese porcelain done in that style), with images of elongated women lacking noticeable bodily contours. Another painting (not shown) where a figure (Mme. Clapisson) exhibits a fine porcelain quality is 'In the Rose Garden' or 'In the Roses' (1882, private collection, Las Vegas, not to be mistaken for other works with a similar title), of a woman sitting on a garden bench. Her face and dress emit a purplish luminosity much like a porcelain figure under a bright light.

A more literal case of japonisme is 'Madame Georges Charpentier and her Children' (1878, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY) shown below, in what was then known as her 'Japanese room', exemplifying the japonaiserie style salon culture and décor of cosmopolitan elites. Besides the representation of numerous Far Eastern objets d'art, it once again illustrates Renoir's mix of the two types of Japanese aesthetic: the more diffused, earthy quality provided by the kakemono (hanging scroll) paintings covering the entire back wall, which sets the primary chromatic theme; and the children's dress in the left foreground balanced by the blue and white porcelain in the right background, together providing the finer porcelain hues to the picture. This was one of the most successful of Renoir's paintings until then, in no small part due to its integration of Japanese motifs and the aesthetic that went with them.

It is a piece that squarely merits discussion in the context of the larger japonisme movement, if just for the various Japanese motifs in the picture; yet surprisingly, there are authors such as Distel who skirt all mention of Japan in relation to it (1995). Nothing about the fact that the Charpentiers, generous patrons of Renoir, were Japanophiles—par excellence; and naturally not a word that the room was expressly decorated to be 'Japanese'. Yet as Robert Herbert, for many years the leading professor of Impressionist art at Yale and later Mount Holyoke College, pointed out:

> "The most conspicuous appearance of japonism in his [Renoir's] own painting is in the large canvas of 1878, Mme. Georges Charpentier and her Children, where the Charpentiers' own Japanese objects are featured. When exhibited in the Salon of 1879, the painting's success among critics showed Renoir's integration of japonism with the tradition of Titian and Delacroix. Of course he spurned the mere imitation of Japanese objects, although he honored the Charpentiers' contributions to the vogue. What one should admire, he wrote, is the principle observed by Japanese craftspeople, that of inspiration from nature." (Herbert, 2000: 24).

Some of those objects, such as what appears to be a painting on the wall above the bamboo/rattan-like chair in the upper right background, remind us in terms of general conception including picture format and chromatic scale, to some of Renoir's later works such as his pair of 'Dancing Girls' (1909) at The National Gallery in London. And it was in the Japanese salon that Renoir often "rubbed elbows", as Herbert writes, with intellectuals known for their keen interest in Japan, such as Émile Zola and Edmond de Goncourt, among a host of others, at Marguerite Charpentier's prestigious soirées (Herbert, 2000, Preface xiii). Here and elsewhere, Renoir must have also frequently encountered Japanese art—from the collection of the Charpentiers or their friends, those of Monet, and others of Renoir's artistic circle such as Manet, or the extensive possessions of Duret, whose prints were unfortunately auctioned off after his passing, but five hundred of his Japanese illustrated books are preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (see Coralie Castel, 'Illustrated books from the Duret collection 2022', European Association for Japanese Resource Specialists, at eajrs.net).

Detail of Madame Georges Charpentier and her Children, 1878, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Because of Renoir's rich and thick painterly qualities, with both an intense mixing and mosaic-like distinctiveness of colors, best achieved in oils, his paintings do not 'feel' Japanese, despite the influence (but then again, the same could be said of van Gogh). But when we include the chromatic and textural qualities of ceramics, paper crafts, textiles, and other kogei, alongside the diverse graphic imagery provided by ukiyo-e in print and picture book form, as two distinct artistic sources, we can see how they might fuse together as a powerful imaginative force contributing to the unique character of his art.

Kiln Effects on the Canvas Surface

That combined aesthetic effect may underlie Renoir's 'Seascape' (1879, Art Institute of Chicago), unusual among his works for its stormy and dynamic nature. This piece, frequently called 'Wave' in the literature, will be referred to as such here (even the Art Institute of Chicago's extensive 'Cat 8. Seascape, 1879' commentary discusses it under the topic "The Wave in Impressionist Art"). Francesca Castellani, calling it "The Wave", writes regarding the piece:

> "This view which revolves around the impressive, majestic movement of the wave rolling back onto itself, is reminiscent of Courbet's seascapes: romanticizing the interpretation of the storm, with a solid texture that grows thicker around the crest or the deep blue of the sea. However, one also notes the influence of Japanese prints, such as Hokusai's wave at Kanagawa." (*Renoir: His Life and Works*, 1998: 137)

Colin Bailey offers the following insights into the magnificent piece:

> "Anticipating Monet's 'coastscapes' by two years, Renoir's Wave
> looked to realist painting and Japanese art as its models."
> (*Renoir Landscapes: 1865-1883,* 2007: 200)

Noting how Courbet's seascapes of the late 1860s were one likely inspiration for the painting, Bailey, more balanced in his consideration of sources, also notes that: "although Vollard recalled Renoir dismissing Japanese prints in no uncertain terms, in the 1870s at least he [Renoir] had been sufficiently interested in them to engage in conversations on the subject with no less a connoisseur than Philippe Burty." And adds with a refreshing forthrightness:

> "Hokusai's Great Wave from the series Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji
> stands as an ukiyo-e godfather to Renoir's entire series." (Ibid.)

Renoir, Seascape/Wave, 1879, Art Institute of Chicago

Makuzu, Vase, 19th century, Edo or Meiji period, MET

Like Hokusai, who made many other illustrations of waves besides his iconic 'Great Wave' scattered throughout his *Manga* or *Modern Designs for Combs and Pipes* Vol.1, so did Renoir, producing waves of differing turbulence and magnitude, in differing proximity and perspective—ranging from 'The Wave' (1882, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis) to his 'Marine, Guernesey' (1883, Musée d'Orsay).

Bailey concludes: "It is Renoir's seamless integration of such sources [i.e., Courbet and Hokusai] in the service of a poetic naturalism that is so impressive here." Yet we should also point out, as scholars such as Oshima Seiji might have argued, the philosophical underpinnings of Renoir's mature poetic naturalism probably arose in no small part from his encounter with Japanese art and the worldview he found within it. Jean Renoir, in his biography of his father the painter, provides the following comments his father made, which shed light on the connection between Japan and Renoir's idea of art as revealing natural beauty through poetic expression:

> "There isn't a person, a landscape, or a subject that doesn't possess at least some interest—although sometimes more or less hidden. When a painter discovers this hidden treasure, other people immediately exclaim at its beauty. Old Corot opened our eyes to the beauty of the Loing, which is a river like any other; and I am sure that the Japanese landscape is no more beautiful than other landscapes. But the point is that Japanese painters knew how to bring out their hidden treasure." (*Renoir My Father*, 1962: 222).

What is appealing about Renoir's painting is that it combines the decorative and the poetic—which may also be considered the defining characteristic of Japanese decorative art. This is not a subjective appraisal; it is at the very least material fact: verse in Japanese kana calligraphy was commonly embedded onto crafted objects, and many craft designs are of an allegorical nature referring to famous lines of poetry. Japan was once essentially a poetic nation, and so it was in Renoir's eyes.

The palette of Renoir's 'Wave', with its dominating, rich blues with greens, textured and thickly applied, recalls the colors favored by Hokusai in his landscape scenes. At the same time, they are also akin to Japanese ceramic glazes and cloisonné enamel that often have a raised, textured aspect, and which produce deep, complex hues and reflections from the application of metals such as silver.

Ceramicists such as Makuzu Kozan and his workshop, part of a vast network of pottery kilns throughout Japan, were exporting such works to Europe precisely at this time. Shown next to Renoir's 'Wave' (Seascape) is the Makuzu 'Vase' (19th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Though not precisely dated, either from the late Edo or early Meiji period, it is representative of the hues produced then. Also comparable to Renoir's palette would be the 'Ota-yaki tokkuri', a glazed ceramic sake decanter, illustrated in the *Kanko-zusetsu* (観古図説) by Ninagawa Noritane, of which a French language annotated version was published in 1876 (before the 'Wave'), edited by H. Ahrens (Imprimerie et librairie de C. Lévy, Yokohama). An image of the carafe can be found in Imai Yuko's *Togei no japonismu* (2016, plate 19).

Well before the Meiji period, from the 17th century, large ceramic picture plates, known as 'o-zara', made for interior display, were being abundantly produced, such as 'Ko-Kutani' (old Kutani) wares in 'aode' (or 'aote', 青手), characterized by similar combinations of blues and greens, with either yellow and/or whites, where waves are a classic design pattern. Ceramics such as these were among the exports from Japan in the Meiji era. For the sake of reference, it should be noted that Japanese earthenware tea bowls of even greater antiquity also share something in common with Renoir's wave paintings. A fine example of a ceramic glaze reminiscent of those hues is a stoneware with iron and rice-straw-ash glazes at the Freer Gallery of Art, 'Vase, with lacquer lid for use as tea ceremony water jar' from Imari, Saga (1596-1615, image in Appendix). And among the works of the versatile Honami Koetsu (1558–1637), pivotal in the development of Japanese aesthetics, is his tea bowl 'Fujisan' (early 17th century, Sunritz Hattori Museum, Suwa, image in Appendix), a designated 'national treasure' of Japan. Its archetypal design has influenced tea ceremony ceramics down the centuries, and although thought to symbolize the famous Mount Fuji, it also conveys the impression of a vast, turbulent ocean that strikes a kindred psychological chord to Renoir's 'Wave'.

Jean Renoir relates how there was "a vogue for everything Chinese" (which possibly is a case of mistaken identity; almost all things to Jean regarding the Far East are Chinese, while the comments about Japan are direct quotes from his father or his writings). According to Jean Renoir, Auguste Renoir's elder brother Henri had an interest in this vogue, and took his young brother, around the time they worked together, to "an exhibition of lacquered objects and china". However, Auguste was not so impressed by the porcelain vases with elaborate designs as was his brother, and recounted to his son:

> "But suddenly over in one corner I discovered some marvellous pottery: the forms were so simple I was quite moved by them. They had flecks of copper oxide in them—*the kind of green that makes you think of waves*: in short, porcelain that had been treated without too much care, like earthenware—good thick porcelain that you could handle without being afraid of breaking it." (in J. Renoir, *Renoir, My Father*, 1962: 67-8, *italics* added)

This reminds us of Sen no Rikyu, the famed 16th century master of the tea ceremony, known for having eschewed the "perfection of celadons and favored rough textured and irregular peasant ware" (Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art*, 1984: 148). We shall soon revisit this Eastern aesthetic of earthenware which Renoir was much taken by in his younger days.

Another Renoir piece using quite different colors, but also possessing a ceramic quality is his 'Garden in the rue Cortot, Montmartre' (1876, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh). Christopher Riopelle, Curator of Post-1800 Paintings at the National Gallery, London, discussing Monet's influence on "the collapse of the space between foreground and middle ground" in the work, observes:

> "That spatial effect, along with the insistently vertical format of the canvas and the absence of horizon, also suggest a decorative intent not unrelated to such characteristics of Japanese prints as pictorial flatness." (*Renoir Landscapes: 1865 - 1883,* 2007: 184)

The flatness, the "insistently vertical format", the absence of horizon, the generally decorative effect, as well as the combination of bright coloring on a subdued mixed tone backdrop, is also quite reminiscent of Meiji era Japanese ceramic floral designs, such as those combined with patinaed bronze. As an example, next to Renoir's 'Garden in rue Cortot', we have placed a piece by Hayashi Kodenji and/or his workshop, 'A Cloisonne Vase' (late 19th century, private collection, auctioned by Christie's in 2012, formerly part of the Avo Krikorian Collection, image Christie's). Hayashi Kodenji was another of those Meiji era virtuoso ceramicists, whose works were in high demand in Europe. Christie's description follows:

> "Worked in various thicknesses of silver wire and coloured cloisonné enamels on a dark blue ground with a maple tree surrounded by a profusion of flowers including chrysanthemums, irises, wild pinks and grasses, the foot with floral lappets, the neck with a band of geometric pattern, silver rims." (www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5561082)

Renoir, Garden in the rue Cortot, 1876, Carnegie Museum of Art

Hayashi Kodenji Workshop, A Cloisonné Vase, late 19th cent., private coll.

While the background is a pure, lacquer-like black (one can imagine a similar piece with a bronze patinaed backdrop or mixed glaze), the resemblance here is nevertheless astonishing, in overall compositional character and density, and in decorative details. Though not critical for the comparison, we could note that even Renoir's tree and its branches, though bare, are like the thin trunked, forked Kodenji-style of trees; and close to the ground one can observe in each the clusters of straight-shooting growth. A thin trunked, forked tree with its two branches broken, we might add, is a standard motif in suiboku painting (e.g., Kubo Shunman's scroll paintings from the Bunka-era, 1804-1818). Whether coincidental or not, they attest to a striking affinity of decorative style.

Seen in this light, Renoir's 'Wave' (Seascape), in terms of its ceramic aesthetic, though different in every other respect from the Garden, provides an interesting juxtaposition to it, along with the Japanese vases. While the Garden conveys quiet and stillness in a format and color scheme almost diametrically opposed to the dynamic 'Wave', which is a 'landscape' work, the two nevertheless have a compatible decorative effect characteristic of Japan.

If we wish to focus more upon the purely ceramic quality of Renoir's paintings, we find it often manifests itself strongly in the backdrop of his subject matter. His 'Tama, the Japanese Dog' (1876, Clark Art Institute), also the subject of a Manet painting, belonging to that great collector of Japanese art—who was co-founder of the Banque de Paris (now BNP Paribas) and once fearless revolutionary politician—Henri Cernuschi, provides an excellent example of this. The painting also demonstrates, once again, the breadth of japanalia integrated into Renoir's art, extending to flora and fauna. We find the presence not only of porcelains, fans, umbrellas, and hanging scrolls in his work, but also Japanese chins (Tama's breed), the Japanese red-crowned crane or 'tanchozuru', and a variety of Japanese chrysanthemums, all of which will be discussed in due order. In fact, Renoir seems to have done two paintings of Tama, one in the previous year (or possibly the same year), 'The Dog Tama' (1875/76, private collection, in B. E. White, 1984: 58) with "TAMA" clearly inscribed in the lower

right of the canvas. This is worth noting because Renoir rarely obliged to do portraits of pets alone as a 'sitter', and indicates that Renoir was likely in meaningful contact with Cernuschi during the mid-1870s, a point of interest we will return to in a different context. Tama, by the way, is a pet name given traditionally to cats, not dogs, in Japan, but that could have been intentional, given the owner's independent and quixotic nature.

Renoir, Tama the Japanese Dog, 1876, Clark Art Institute

Detail of Satsuma ware, Flower Vase, late 18th cent., MET

Compare the background in 'Tama' with the detail of 'Flower Vase' (late 18th century) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Object no. 91.1.270, second image) to the right of the pet portrait. This type of Satsuma ware, covered with mottled glaze, produces a chromatic effect remarkably similar to that of Renoir's backdrop. Depending on the lighting, if in a typical lamp-lit room, where 'Tama' would originally have been hung, or during the day in such a room reflecting light from European furnishings and decor, the hues and tone of the painting would probably seem even closer to the MET's Satsuma vase.

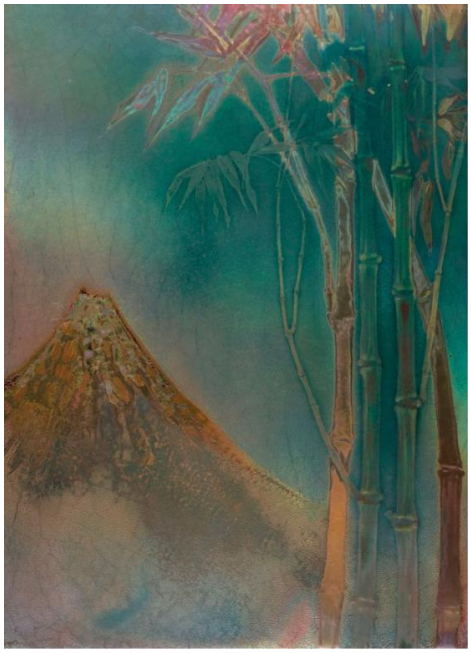
Satsuma, however, is not the most renowned of ceramics associated with this 'tsuchi-aji' ('earthen tastes') aesthetic. The vase is but one that could be chosen from many thousands like it in appearance, in endless variations of a theme, coming from a variety of regional kilns. More so are other regional pottery styles, such as Tokoname, Bizen, Karatsu, Iga, or Shigaraki, to name a few, using techniques such as 'hi-iro' (火色 literally 'fire coloring' from iron oxidization), 'koge' (こげ 'burnt' from carbon trapping), and especially 'hai-kaburi' (灰かぶり, ash glaze), where the kiln's wood-ash creates a richly textured glaze with earthy tones in endless gradations of muted greens, blue-greys, yellows, oranges, iron browns and black. Such earthen pottery and high-fired stoneware, where these characteristics are most salient, have their roots in prehistoric and early historic migrations as well as in native Jomon traditions, and can be considered more or less indigenous to Japan, differing from the case of porcelain. Urban and regional kilns are estimated to have reached approximately three thousand sites in their heyday during the Kamakura period, centered in the 14th century (Idekawa Naoki, *Yakimono no Kantei-nyumon,* 1983).

A good amount of research has been done on the arrival of the full range of Japanese ceramics in France during the late 19th century, notably by the aforementioned Imai Yuko, as demonstrated in her thick tome, *Togei no japonisumu* (陶芸のジャポニスム [The Japonisme of Ceramics], Nagoya University, 2016), as well as being periodically taken up in exhibitions, such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art's: 'Firing the Imagination: Japanese Influence on French Ceramics, 1860-1910' (Aug. 2024-Aug. 2025).

Fusions: Porcelain, Petal, Pigment—and Complexion

Renoir was not alone in his assimilation of Japanese kogei aesthetics. He was part of a shared awakening among European artists, though ahead of many, and perhaps more subtle and transformative in his incorporation of Japanese ceramic derived chromatics into his work. His rich range of greens from a near luminescent aquamarine to a lighter yellow-green in his 'Jeune fille à la corbeille de fleurs' (c.1890, private collection, image Wikimedia Commons), which follows, seems to reflect the popularity of such hues that adorned a great quantity of Meiji export ceramics flowing into Europe. These were emulated by European ceramic artists, as is evident in the piece shown to the right, 'View of Mount Fuji' (c. 1900-01, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal) by Clément Massier.

Renoir, Jeune fille à la corbeille de fleurs, c. 1890, private collection



Massier, View of Mount Fuji, c. 1900-01, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal

While possessing the radiance of porcelain, the young girl is also the personification of the natural environment about her: the wave of her falling hair not unlike the bend of nearby branches, her pink touched dress glows more than her flowers, and her green sash concentrates the chromatic spectrum of vegetal growth from her surroundings. Those surroundings are close to her, an amorphous, intimate presence, which the girl leans on—or rather it seems to press up against her gently—with a softness like the girl herself. Are Renoir's female portraits and floral depictions, each a kind of metamorphosis of the other, his flowers a kind of feminine portraiture, and vice versa? Is it a cliché because it is so true?

The 'Portrait of the Actress Jeanne Samary' (1877/78, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), shown next, has both a porcelain-like brilliance and floral freshness in one; the 'Bouquet of Chrysanthemums and a Japanese Fan' (1880, Pushkin), center, shares something of it. The pink background has an astonishing intensity and melds and meshes together with the head of Jeanne Samary, into one inseparable 'human bouquet'. The vase = the dress, the flowers = the woman;—a simple equation but valid, and in Renoir's work the repeated appearance of Japanese chrysanthemums and vases suggest they have a meaningful place in that vision of beauty.

Renoir, Jeanne Samary, 1877/78, Pushkin

Renoir, Chrysanthemums and Japanese Fan, 1880, Pushkin

Utamaro, Stone Bridge, 1801, AIC

To the right, though not a ceramic piece, we have placed Kitagawa Utamaro's 'Stone Bridge' (1801, Art Institute of Chicago) for perspective, depicting a scene from kabuki theater. Here too, we see a meshing together of pink flowers and a woman with pink hair (in fact part of her costume) into one, analogous to, but more literally than, Renoir. And it might be a hypothesis worth testing—that is, to scan the Samary picture for underlayers, to see if one might actually find something like it there.

Among the Art Institute of Chicago's meticulously researched papers and insightful descriptions of its holdings, regarding 'Chrysanthemums' (c. 1881-82), under the heading 'Chrysanthemum: Flower of the Artist-Gardener', John B. Collins speaks of how chrysanthemums are a complementary aspect of Renoir's japonisme:

> "As *Chrysanthemums* attests, Renoir's interest in the flower as an artistic subject can be dated to at least the early 1880s. He may have had the opportunity to admire paintings of the flower by Claude Monet made in 1878 and 1881. A bouquet of chrysanthemum blossoms provides an extraordinarily ebullient setting for Renoir's painting of the red-haired model Jeanne Samary, *A Girl with a Fan*, circa 1881. In this case the flowers complement the taste for Japonisme suggested by the fan in Samary's hand." (*Renoir Paintings and Drawings,* Cat. 15. Chrysanthemums, 1881/82 at publications.artic.edu/renoir)

What follows is an excellent synopsis of Renoir's 'Chrysanthemum' in the historical context of the Japanese flower's adaptation into French culture:

> "First imported to France from the Far East during the French Revolution, chrysanthemums are a late summer flower appreciated for their strong scent and exceptional range of color and shape. Referenced in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), in the early twentieth century they were still considered an exotic Japanese feature of French gardens. Notably, Renoir's *Chrysanthemums* includes two blossom varieties, each with different color and petal shape—the orange starburst variety with a long, straight petal and the white blossom variety with a shorter, denser petal that gives it a spherical appearance." (Ibid.)

Chrysanthemums, c. 1881-82, Art Institute of Chicago

Collins further identifies Renoir's painting as related to specific Hokusai images, and its strong connection to japonisme:

> "This mixture of blossom varieties is a feature of the celebrated Japanese woodblock print by Hokusai, Chrysanthemums and Bee and further adds to the Japonisme of Renoir's painting. In Hokusai's print the distinctive flat leaf of the chrysanthemum provides visual contrast with the intricate blossoms. The leaf plays an analogous role in Renoir's Chrysanthemums, which takes full advantage of the color and textural potential of the celebrated flower to produce a still-life painting of sublime authority." (Ibid.)

Moreover, Renoir's underdrawings reflect Japanese-inspired spatial arrangements, with flattened planes, and as pointed out above, he shared the Japanese appreciation for the plant's distinctive forms, combining different blossom types within a single arrangement, as also apparent in his two works on the following page. From the number and intensity of his renderings of Japanese chrysanthemums, it is evident they possessed a unique aesthetic significance for him, resulting in works with a chromatic and textural quality that does not emerge with such richness in his other floral still-lifes.

His chrysanthemum 'portraits' could be interpreted as an oil paint adaptation of the Japanese decorative idea of 'kiku-zukushi', a term somewhat unamenable to transliteration, meaning something like 'utterly chrysanthemum' or 'chrysanthemum packed' or 'nothing untouched by chrysanthemums'—it embodies an 'élan vital'—exuberant and life-loving design. This is truly classic Japanese imagery, often applied to kimonos, porcelain, maki-e lacquerware, and painting, and Renoir captures the spirit of it well. A Kinkozan 'Bowl in Thousand Flower Pattern' (late 1800s, Peabody Essex Museum, image Wikimedia Commons), on subdued side of its type, is shown below. While the year of manufacture is unknown, Kinkozan was exporting its wares to the West from the early 1870s, and the bowl gives some conception of the packed and overflowing, yet at the same time intricate quality of Japanese floral design coming into Europe around the time Renoir was painting his chrysanthemums.

Bouquet of Chrysanthemums, 1881, MET

Kinkozan, Bowl, 1800s, Peabody Essex

Vase of Chrys., c.1884, Mu. des Beaux-Arts Rouen

The brightening of color, that vital characteristic of Impressionism, was famously described by Théodore Duret in his defining work on Impressionist painters (*Les Peintres impressionnistes,* 1878). Japanese prints, he said, opened the eyes of artists to seeing the world of color about them in a completely different way. "Before Japan it was impossible" (p. 13)—this was a catalyst for a revolution in perception, not simply something that justified a change already in motion, as some would have it. To Duret in 1878 there were only five Impressionists: Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir, and Morisot, and he naturally meant this applied to all five of them. We shall not repeat his memorable words here because they have been quoted often; only to add that Duret also explains his reason for the exclusion of certain other painters from the group as due to the fact that they were "strict naturalists who remained outside the influence of Japan" ("des naturalistes purs restés en dehors de l'influence du Japon" 1878: 31), thus implying that such influence was a key criterion for inclusion into his exclusive cohort of artists, which of course held true for Renoir as well. This incontrovertible logic seems to be lost at present, where second-hand consensus appears to take precedence over first-hand testimony.

The art critic Edmond Duranty in his essay 'The New Painting' (1876) extolled the Impressionist advances in color: "With regards to visual subtleties and delicate blending of colors, the result is utterly extraordinary." And that, "In this connection, some speak of the Japanese, and maintain that these new painters do nothing more than imitate the color of Japanese prints." To that charge Duranty exclaims "Indeed, I said earlier that they had set off to round Art's Cape of Good Hope. Was it not, then, in order to travel to the Far East?" (English trans. in C. S. Moffett, *The New Painting 1874-1886*, 1986: 42) And though he tries to attribute those subtleties and delicate blending of Japanese colors to the "perpetual daze of the sun", as if it would come to anyone in a hot clime, conflating temperate Japan with the tropics—he does not deny it—for he knows they did imitate Japanese art. The celebrated writer and friend of the Impressionists, Émile Zola, explained it thus:

> "It is certain that our dark painting, our bitumen-like academic painting was caught off guard and forced back to the drawing board when faced with those clear horizons and the beautiful, vibrant touches of the Japanese watercolorists. There was in it a simplicity of means and an intensity of effect that struck our young artists and pushed them along this path of painting tempered by air and light, which all talented newcomers are entering upon today." ('Le Naturalisme au salon', 1880, in *Le Bon combat,* J.P. Bouillon, ed., 1974: 213-214)

Japan was not merely a justification, as many modern scholars would have it, no—it *was* a revelation, which struck them like a slap they needed—unless researchers know better than Zola who stood side by side with them. Must we quote more—but it seems nothing is enough for some. According to Armand Silvestre, one of the leading art critics of the day, that "singularly joyful range of color" which "hastened the success of these newcomers Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley" where "everything in them is gaiety, sparkle, the spring-time fete, evenings of gold or apple trees in flower" was "—Encore, une inspiration du Japon." (Galerie Durand-Ruel, *Recueil d'estampes gravées à l'eau-forte,* 1873: 23)

The painter Alfred Stevens went so far as saying: "The Japanese are true impressionists." (*Impressions on Painting*, 1886: 22)—which actually can be argued legitimately, for ukiyo-e (color woodblock prints of a transient, fleeting, or literally 'floating world'), suibokuga (ink-wash color/monochrome), zenga (Zen 'flash of insight' ink-wash in monochrome), and sekiga (spontaneous, on-the-spot completed painting) artists had a keen awareness of, and desire to capture the outdoor, the every-day, and the instantaneous moment and its sensations, where photographic-type realism was quite secondary in regards to color and form. It was with such qualities in mind that Gérald van der Kemp, then Inspecteur général honoraire des musées of France (one of a long list of directional and curatorial roles), wrote regarding ukiyo-e as "des images d'un monde flottant" (images of a floating world): "N'est-ce pas aussi l'idéale définition de l'impressionnisme [?]" (Aitken and Delafond, 1998: 7).

The Impressionist awakening to color is discussed by Gerald Needham in the following terms:

> "The freshness of Japanese color thus inspired French painters to seek color boldly in their observation of the motif. This is particularly true of Monet, most of whose works in the sixties were not particularly bright, since he was seeking a harmony of light. In 1871 he bought a number of Japanese prints in Holland (earlier he was too poor to acquire them personally), and his color immediately became brighter." (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 118)

Likewise when we look at Renoir's 'Spring Bouquet' (1866, Harvard Art Museums), shown below to the left, and compare it to his later works, such as those above, the difference is apparent. Harvard's gallery text describes 'Spring Bouquet' in the following terms: "This exuberant bouquet in a Japanese vase from early in Renoir's career attests to the artist's engagement with past historical traditions." —Referring to Dutch still life traditions, and the works of 18th century French painters such as Watteau and Boucher. While Harvard's commentator calls it 'exuberant', and perhaps so when viewed in isolation, relatively speaking, it has a more subdued, realist quality than his later works. And it pales in comparison on the scale of exuberance to his chrysanthemum depictions coming after his shared encounter with Monet and other contemporaries of Japanese art.

It should also be noted that the asymmetrical arrangement of the flowers, flowing over en masse to one side, descending and hanging lower than the vase itself in 'kakebana' style—a classic type of 'ikebana' or traditional flower arrangement—hints at early Japanese influence upon Renoir. Such floral arrangements were depicted in woodblock prints and ikebana instructional guides widely distributed at the time, frequently part of European collections, and often reproduced in early illustrated books on Japan.

Spring Bouquet, 1866, Harvard Art Museums
© Fellows and Trustees of Harvard College

Roses and Peonies, 1876, Dallas Museum of Art

Bizen vase, in S. Bing, *Artistic Japan,* no. 11, 1889

For added comparison, placed next to it is 'Roses and Peonies in a Vase' (1876, Dallas Museum of Art), a work which, on our scale of exuberance, rests in between his chrysanthemums of the 1880s and the 'Spring Bouquet' of the 1860s. Once again, the vase appears to be Japanese or one inspired by the East, with an irregular type of design associated with export Bizen ware. An example is provided to its right, 'Flower vase in Bizen Pottery' from Siegfried Bing's *Artistic Japan: Illustrations and Essays* (No. 11, Plate ABC, English version, vol. 2, 1889). In any case, the vase in 'Roses and Peonies' seems to take priority as subject matter over the flowers; the eye goes there first, and rests there longer than with the flowers (this vase reappears at least twice in his oeuvre). The museum commentary describes it thus:

> "Here a bouquet of peonies, rosebuds, and a few other flowers burst forth from the column of a blue ceramic vase decorated with an Asian floral motif. The arrangement is precariously balanced on a dark table set within a furnished interior complete with plush red armchair and a painting in a gilded frame. Renoir played with the colors and textures of these elements, creating a continuum between the cut flowers and floral motifs on the vase and the painting in the background." (Dallas Museum of Art, Collections, at dma.org)

Unlike his chrysanthemum creations, the flowers require 'bolstering', if you will, with additional elements to create maximal artistic impact. We see the movement towards greater brightness, but the chromatic fullness of his later works has not yet been achieved, and it confirms the sense that his choice of the Japanese flower was essential in bringing out the painterly qualities he was striving for. Chrysanthemums were, in other words, not merely a change of subject matter, but possibly, a necessary vehicle in reaching his ideal of color.

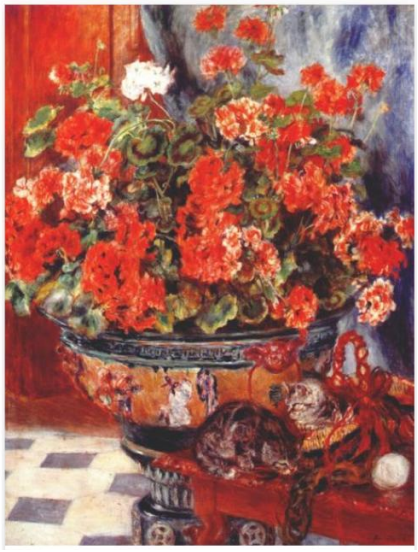
The ceramic and the floral—two faces of a certain japonisme aesthetic—appear intimately related as an artistic stimulus for Renoir. In fact, the shared character of their color is more than 'skin-deep'. While seemingly highly reflective in sunlight, they each have what may be referred to as 'subsurface translucency'—where light does not simply bounce off as it does from flat painted surfaces, but rather penetrates the surface to produce a glow suspended within the material. Petals and porcelain both possess luminous depth—a warm luster and silky softness—together with that outstanding vividness of hues.

It was precisely these qualities that Japanese horticulturalists consciously sought to enhance in their pursuit of the floral arts, and were no different in their attention to detail and in the pursuit of excellence as ceramicists were in theirs. It was this same cultural milieu that gave rise to Imari porcelain and made Kakiemon wares prized by European nobility in the 18th century, as Japanese chrysanthemums would be in the 19th. It was the attainment of nothing less than 'chromatic virtuosity' that must be understood as one of the motivating forces behind the heralding of 'Japonisme' in Europe. Despite the attempt by certain contemporary art historians to dismiss it as a kind of momentary flight of fancy, it was for good reason why the great artistic spirits of the age were so fascinated by things Japanese. Among the most compelling, this chromatic virtuosity was one. Thus the floral and ceramic went hand in hand, resulting in a synergistic japonisme. But flowers and their vases lie at opposite ends of every other measure: one supple and ephemeral to an extreme, the other rigid and as close to immortality as there is among things man-made.

As we have suggested from the beginning, there are various clues to be found of Japanese ceramic inspired, *transmedia* influences upon Renoir. In 'Bouquet in a Vase' (1878, Indianapolis Museum of Art, French title: 'Bouquet de fleurs au vase japonais'), shown below to the left, we have what is likely to be a Meiji period Satsuma export piece, with the typical white serpents/dragons in relief, writhing about on a rich red surface with gold decorative medallions, that probably depict small scenes of the Orient, of figures or perhaps mythical animals. Unlike his chrysanthemum paintings however, it is the vessel, rather than the flowers that stand out—the flowers themselves lack conviction. Renoir seems to have been fond of its design, because he paints it again in 'Peonies' (1878, private collection), where the flowers are portrayed in a livelier manner. We could add that the vase very much recalls the kimono, or more precisely the thick overcoat-like 'uchikake', in Monet's painting of Madame Monet as 'La Japonaise'.

Bouquet in a Vase, 1878, IMA

Young Woman in Red Dress, c. 1892, FAM



Geraniums and Cats, 1881, private coll., Wikiart

In the center is Renoir's 'Young Woman in Red Dress' (c. 1892, Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo); and to the right is his 'Geranium and Cats' (1881, private collection). In the latter, a wide ceramic pot, possibly a Satsuma-yaki jardiniere, holds the geraniums, and is decorated with figures in relief that can be faintly discerned; one figure in white kneeling and pleading towards a standing figure. The cats have brocaded collars/leashes, in red—the classic color of Japanese cat collars, depicted in countless ukiyo-e prints, and the picture is filled with reds with white accents distributed throughout.

This image, together with the 'Bouquet in a Vase' on the left, red with their touches of white, create a surrounding not incongruous with the central painting of the 'Young Woman in Red Dress', which, like the two images on each side, is lightened by touches of white and areas of yellow tinted beige.

But recall also, how the Japanese fan—the sensu folding fan and the roundish fixed uchiwa fan—were extremely apropos symbols of the 'sui-sai' or watercolor-like, diffused aspect of the 'kogei aesthetic' that worked its way into Renoir's paintings. As with 'Still Life with Bouquet' (1871), the first painting of Renoir's we looked at, it "shows how the color of a Japanese fan can set the tone for a whole painting." (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 118) In his 'Young Woman in Red Dress' above, though a fan is nowhere to be seen, we nevertheless sense the presence of that aesthetic element.

Indications of a conscious artistic connection between the visual and ceramic arts can be found in paintings of the time, just as a link between literature and ukiyo-e is suggested by Manet's portrait of Émile Zola (1868, Musée d'Orsay). Regarding another painting at the same museum by Henri Fantin-Latour shown below, Martin Eidelberg, now professor emeritus of art history at Rutgers University, and William R. Johnston, then at the Walters Art Museum, in their chapter, 'Japonisme and French Decorative Arts' in the aforementioned *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art 1854-1910,* remark on its implications regarding such cross-media interactions:

> "We should also recognize that there was some relationship between the decorative and the fine arts. An early testimony of this is Fantin-Latour's painting *A Studio in the Batignolles Quarter*, 1870, where Manet is surrounded by, among others, Renoir, Astruc, Bazille, and Monet (originally Duranty and Degas were to have been included as well)."

And that while one "might almost take it for granted the Oriental-looking vase" was Japanese (visible at the far left), "the vase is actually French and was made by one of the first Japonistes, Laurent Bouvier." (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 146) Eidelberg and Johnston go further to note that many of the better-known French ceramicists at the time started out as painters, and thus closely intertwined were the two—ceramics and painting—in authorship and aesthetic inspiration.

Fantin-Latour, A Studio in the Batignolles, 1870
Musée d'Orsay

Fantin-Latour, Nature morte de fiançailles, 1869
Musée de Grenoble

The 'Japonisant' Batignolles Group

Concerning the subjects in the Fantin-Latour painting, sometimes referred to as the 'Batignolles Group', John Rewald recounts how they were called "the Japanese painters" at one time, according to Jules-Antoine Castagnary, the French art critic favorable to the Impressionists (in Rewald, 1973: 208). And rightly so, as the seated Manet, who commands the paintbrush, the recognized leader, brimmed with a well-documented enthusiasm for Japanese art that "was obvious to all his friends" as Frank Whitford pointed out in his *Japanese Prints and Western Painters* (1977), published during that first burst of japonisme studies. Contemporaries of the Impressionists, such as William Michael Rossetti, brother of Dante Gabriel, in his lengthy memoirs, recalling the early days of Japanese influence, wrote:

> "I have heard say, and perhaps with accuracy, that *Edouard Manet was the 'head and front' of Japonnerie,* and I know that at an early date in the movement Tissot was a keen collector. Rossetti was equally astonished and delighted with Japanese designs; their enormous energy, their instinct for whatever savours of life and movement, their exquisite superiority to symmetry in decorative form, their magic of touch and impeccability of execution, carried him away." (*Some Reminiscences,* vol. 1, 1906: 276, *italics* added)

The Frenchman James Tissot, while friends with Degas and Manet, and the Englishman Dante Gabriel Rossetti, we will leave in England, along with Whistler who we already discussed, though he did once reside in the Batignolles quarter and returned to Paris often, being a good friend of Fantin-Latour and Degas (and certain of his works, notably his 'Nocturnes' are arguably Impressionist). But we should spend some time looking at the other individuals who comprise this circle, because they were a critical part of Renoir's social, intellectual, and artistic milieu.

Seated next to Manet is the multi-talented Zacharie Astruc—sculptor, painter, poet, and art critic—honored by having his portrait done by Manet, doubly recognized as a figure of significance among the group by Fantin-Latour's choosing to paint the scene of his portraiture. And for good reason, as Astruc eloquently voiced and defined the group's early ideas, as well as encompassing those of the Japonisme movement in general, publishing for instance, in February and March of 1867, articles in *L'Étendard* under the title 'Fine Arts, The Empire of the Rising Sun' (Beaux-Arts, l'Empire du Soleil Levant), known for the exhortation it contained to do as or to 'become' Japanese:

"Faisons-nous Japonais!"

Standing between Manet and Astruc is Renoir; and to the right of Renoir is Émile Zola, a keen collector of Japanese art, a fact well-known from Manet's portrait of this father of French Naturalism in his Rue Guyot studio in Paris; but less known is the extent of his collecting—Japanese prints were to be found in his other places of stay. His house in Médan, for one, was lined with 'shunga' (erotic ukiyo-e) in the staircase, which the Irish novelist and critic George Moore, who did much to promote the Impressionists in Britain, humorously described as "hung with prints of furious fornications", and which he saw as an announcement of Zola's Naturalism ('A visit to Médan', appendix to the 1926 edition of *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1886, in Whitford, 1977: 122).

Zola was but one (but not the earliest) in a long line of French writers—along with his contemporaries Baudelaire and Champfleury—intrigued by Japanese art, from Gustave Flaubert, who Kobayashi Taichiro explored early on in 'Flaubert and the Origins of the Spread of Japanese Art into Europe' (日本美術欧州進出の端緒とフローベール, *Bijutsu jidai*, 1939, vol. 2, no. 2); to Stéphane Mallarmé, taken up by both Japanese and American researchers, such as Pamela A. Genova in 'Stéphane Mallarmé Staging Japonisme' (*Writing Japonisme,* Northwestern University Press, 2016); on to Marcel Proust, examined, for instance, by Luc Fraisse in his *Proust et le japonisme* (Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1997). For the wider trans-Atlantic perspective, see Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1958)—for starters.

Peering over the shoulder of Manet is the art collector and patron with musical talents Edmond Maître—not quite a core member, but someone with whom Renoir would later become a close neighbor, and conceive Maître's portrait with an expressly japonisant motif (to be discussed), just as we found in Renoir's portrait of his 'spouse' or long-time companion 'Rapha Maître'. An interest in Japanese culture from a Frenchman with musical inclinations in 1870 should be no surprise, but rather an early indication of what was to come from Claude Debussy such as in his *La Mer* (1905) and 'Poissons d'or' from *Images* (1907), Maurice Ravel in his 'Une barque sur l'océan' from *Miroirs* (1904-05), and Igor Stravinsky with his *Trois poésies de la lyrique japonaise* (1912-13).

An idea of the pervasiveness of this general influence into almost every field of art at the time can be gleaned by the japonisant architecture of the Maître family's Chalet Maître and the gateway design of their Villa Utica, both in Maître's sleepy home town of Arcachon (photos in E. Desurvire, *Edmond Maître par lui-même*, Tome II: 1876-1898, 2023: 458-9). For more on this topic, see for example, Jean-Sébastien Cluzel, ed., *Japonisme and Architecture in France 1550–1930* (2022).

As for the German painter Otto Scholderer standing to the left close to Manet, often bypassed in discussions of the group, the influence of Japanese art, likely of painting rather than prints, given his particular combination of tonal values—possibly including the chromatic and textural qualities of scroll-mounting material surrounding a painting, or otherwise ornamented paper for poetry, emaki, or sutra scrolls—as well as that of lacquerware design, is elegantly conveyed in his works, though understated, as in his 'Chrysanthemums and Peaches' (1893, private collection) and 'Still Life with Blue Vase and Mushrooms' (1891, Städel Museum, Frankfurt). His approach to japonisme is somewhat akin to that of the Englishman Albert Moore, who incorporated Japanese tonal sensibilities into a refined classicism which will be considered later in relation to Renoir.

The tall standing figure in profile to the right of Zola is Frédéric Bazille, whose references to Japanese art were also inconspicuous but definitely present in certain paintings and drawings such as his 'African Woman with Peonies' (1870, Musée Fabre, Montpellier), with a vase design similar to the one in the Fantin-Latour Batignolles painting; and his sketches of a swallow-like flock in flight from his sketchbook (RF 5259, folio 36 verso). And standing at the far right edge of the group, behind Bazille, looking unbecomingly ghostly, is the indefatigable Monet, whose interest in Japanese art hardly needs explaining at this point, being woven into the length of this study.

Then there are those who regularly frequented the Café Guerbois, where the group met, but are absent in Fantin-Latour's picture. Most importantly Edgar Degas, as noted originally a candidate to be a sitter for Fantin-Latour's painting, and in any serious monograph on japonisme treated at length, need not be reviewed here except to state, firstly, as Klaus Berger did in his contribution to the Cambridge Studies in the History of Art, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to*

Matisse, that the "three pioneers of Japonisme" were "Manet, Whistler, and Degas" (1992: 20); and furthermore, that one of the first to delve in depth into Degas's japonisme was the aforementioned Kobe University professor Kobayashi Taichiro, in his *Hokusai and Degas* (1974). Perhaps we could also add that someone with an experienced eye for portraiture might sense the link between Degas and ukiyo-e, not only in compositional devices, but in psychological portrayal at the most fundamental level of conception—expressing feminine 'disgruntledness' (from disposition and social circumstance) *as art*—by comparing Kiyomine's, that is Torii Kiyomitsu II's 'Angry Drinker' (late 1810s, e.g., Victoria and Albert Museum) with what is widely known as 'The Absinthe Drinker' (or 'Dans un café', 1875/76, Musée d'Orsay) or 'Sulking' (c. 1870, MET).

Alfred Sisley, a recognized member of the Batignolles circle and close associate of Renoir's—of whom Renoir did a fine portrait, seated on Monet's decidedly Asia-evocative bamboo chair—while reticent regarding Japan, nevertheless incorporated Japanese compositional techniques with unmistakable structural allusions to Hiroshige, some pointed out by Siegfried Wichmann in *Japonisme* (1980): 'English Coast, Penarth' (1897, Landesmuseum Hannover) and 'Storr's Rock, Langland Bay, Morning' (1897, Kunstmuseum Bern); other comparisons were part of the exhibition *Colours of Impressionism: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay,* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (March-July 2018). And his 'Ferry to the Île de la Loge, Flood' (1872, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen) deserves to be considered in relation to Hiroshige in terms of its bold vertical transversals, while 'Bank of the Seine in Autumn' (1876, Städel, Frankfurt am Main) strongly suggests Hokusai in its synthesis of landscape layout and descriptions of herbage.

Likewise Pissarro, without question a central figure of the Impressionist movement, Renoir's collaborator and friend over the decades (whose Jewish roots only caused a temporary rupture late in their lives), wrote to his son Lucien in February 1893 about the ongoing Utamaro-Hiroshige exhibition at the Durand-Ruel gallery: "Hiroshige is a marvelous Impressionist. Monet, Rodin, and I are enthusiastic about the show. I am pleased with my effects of snows and floods; these Japanese artists confirm my belief in our vision." (*Camille Pissarro: Letters to His son Lucien*, ed. by J. Rewald, 1943: 242). But this could be considered somewhat misleading, as there is much about Pissarro's "snows and floods" that indicate he already had a certain familiarity with Japanese prints, just as Sisley with his scenes of snow, considering that, in a letter to Duret from almost exactly two decades earlier (Feb. 2, 1873), Pissarro had written:

> "Lorsque vous viendrez, j'espère vous montrer des études hardies qui pourront vous plaire peut-être, car il faut penser que vous revenez du Japon, pays hardi et très révolutionnaire en art." (Cabinet des dessins, Louvre, discussed by Geneviève Lacambre in *Le Japonisme*, 1988: 324)

See also Christopher Lloyd, 'Camille Pissarro and Japonisme' in *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium* (Society for the Study of Japonisme, Tokyo, 1980). The truth is perhaps closer to what Wynford Dewhurst wrote about Japanese art in an age when the memory of the artists was a living one:

> "This influence is to be observed in *all* modern painting since 1870, when artists first commenced to collect examples of the Japanese methods." (1904: 91, *italics* added)

Even those in Renoir's wider circle of artist colleagues, such as Gustave Caillebotte, who became outing comrade and kind supporter, and eventually close friend whose loss was later deeply mourned (also posited as a sitter for 'Luncheon of the Boating Party', 1880-81, Phillips Collection, DC, to be discussed), made frequent use of Japanese artistic principles and motifs. Kirk Varnedoe, chief curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA for many years, in his *Gustave Caillebotte* (Yale, 1987), illustrates this aspect of the artist's works, as do others.

Fantin-Latour himself created the fine image of an oriental vase shown next to his Batignolles group painting—the Musée de Grenoble identifies it as Chinese, but was likely to be considered at the time Japanese, according to scholars studying the matter, as Emily E. Brink ('A Natural History of Porcelain…', *L'Esprit Créateur,* Vol. 56, No. 3, Fall 2016). Along with Chinese ceramics of this type, it is exceedingly similar to Arita cylindrical (trumpet) vases taking after them with the same toned cobalt blue underglaze as in the Fantin-Latour picture, abundantly produced in the 1670s and 80s, some with almost identical rock shapes at the base as in the painting (see e.g., Kyushu Ceramic Museum, ed., *The Voyage of Old-Imari Porcelains,* 2000: 96-97). Thus, while the prototype 'blue and white' is Chinese, the actual vessel could be Japanese. Meanwhile his 'Japanese Anemones' (1884, Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museum) is indisputably so, and its contrasting subtleties of color and texture arguably also; his 'White Lilies' (1877, Victoria and Albert Museum) is virtually identical not only in its forms but in its light values to images such as those from Hiroshige's floral 'ishizuri-e harimaze' (woodblock prints imitating stone pressings) including the slight variations in the darkness surrounding the lilies, reminiscent of uneven ink impressions from rubbing woodblocks with specialized pads called 'baren'. François Fosca, despite his reluctant attitude towards the idea of Japanese influence upon Impressionist painting, noted:

> "The craze for Japanese art was so intense that a number of artists and writers—including Bracquemond, Burty, Astruc, **Fantin**, and Solon—founded a 'Japoniste' society whose members dined together every week at Solon's home in Sèvres. They ate using a dinner service decorated in the Japanese style by Bracquemond, and everything, except for the napkins, cigars, and ashtrays, was Japanese." (*De Diderot à Valéry: les Écrivains et les Arts visuels,* Chapter 16, 'Les Goncourt', p. 254, Albin Michel, 1960, bold added)

Fosca is referring to the legendary 'Société du Jing-lar' as they called themselves and were known by their friends. Elsewhere he notes, regarding Baudelaire's early interest and possession of ukiyo-e prints, that in a letter to Arsène Houssaye (dating either from 1861 or 1862) the poet received "un paquet de japonaiseries" which he divided among his friends, and kept three for himself. And that a certain number of his prints he gave to Fantin-Latour ("Elles avaient été données par Baudelaire à Fantin-Latour." 1960: 206-7). For Baudelaire, herald of the Symbolist movement and a harbinger of modernism, was also an admirer and disseminator of Japanese prints.

Thus was the nature of those who became part of or affiliated with the Batignolles group—wining, dining, debating among themselves at their homes or those of their patrons', in cafes, galleries, and in their studios—or traveling together, always eager to discuss their new finds, and at times giving, receiving, or buying Japanese artwork, often prints. To borrow the language of mathematical sets, they were dense, 'hyperconnected' and 'highly intersected' with japonisme as a 'consensus element'—and Renoir was relatively close to the core of it.

Others now of lesser fame yet equally passionate Guerbois café debaters—such as the writer Edmond Duranty, admirer of Degas, quoted earlier and originally a candidate to be a sitter—frequented the shop of Far Eastern curiosities, La Porte Chinoise—somewhat of a misnomer, for it seems there were as many Japanese goods for sale there as Chinese, at times perhaps more.

> "Without something to sustain it, curiosity about Japanese art might have languished for a while within this small circle of artists and writers. But in 1862, the Desoye couple, *who had stayed for some time in Japan*, opened a boutique of Far Eastern art objects, La Porte Chinoise, at 220 rue de Rivoli. Success was immediate, and soon the shop became the meeting place for painters—Fantin, Degas, Whistler, Tissot, Monet; the engraver Jacquemart; and writers—Baudelaire, the Goncourts, Burty, Zola, **Duranty**, Champfleury, who were joined by Villot, the curator of the Louvre, and Solon, the director of Sèvres Manufactory." (Fosca, Chapter 16 'Les Goncourt', 1960: 253, *italics* and bold added)

We find not only Baudelaire but even Champfleury among them—that famed novelist and champion of the Realists, a great admirer of Hokusai—as a visitor to the shop, along with Duranty and Fantin-Latour, and of course Degas and Monet. Here the pioneers of Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Impressionism, and industry—stripes of every color, shared this admiration for Japanese art. Note also the presence of prominent figures of the French arts and crafts establishment, such as the former curator of the Louvre Frédéric Villot, and, once again, the director of the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, the younger Marc-Louis-Emmanuel Solon.

Finally, we should include Berthe Morisot as a much later, but unexpectedly close artistic colleague of Renoir especially during the last decade of her life in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Anyone who has seen her 'Two Sisters' (often called 'Two Sisters on a Couch', 1869, National Gallery of Art, DC) with various japonisant designs; 'Children at the Basin' (1886, Marmottan Monet, Paris), depicting two children in front of a fishbowl-like ceramic in classic Arita blues with tracery in a fine gilt; 'Julie Manet and her Greyhound Laërte' (1893, Marmottan) with an ukiyo-e triptych on the wall; 'Portrait of Marie Hubbard' (1874, Museum Ordrupgaard, Charlottenlund, DK) where the sitter holds a sensu folding fan; or 'Daydreaming' (1877, Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City) with a uchiwa fixed fan—can recognize the vital role the Japanese elements provide—the critical spark of color that 'clinches' and crowns the pictures; but especially noteworthy is her drypoint rendering 'Duck and Reeds' (1889, e.g., MET), which makes her interest in 'kachoga' (flower and bird) genre draftsmanship strikingly evident.

We shall look at this in a little more depth, as it gives us a more 'granular' feel for japonisme as a daily-life sort of experience among Impressionist artists. Exemplifying the meticulous research conducted by Japanese scholars, Yoshida Noriko, Professor of Intercultural Studies at Kobe University, has determined that by 1890, in the years Renoir had established a strong friendship with her, Morisot's increased involvement in Japanese art can be documented across multiple sources ('Berthe Morisot and Japanese Art [2]', *Stella* 33, 2014-12, Kyushu University):

> "In May of that year, invited by Mary Cassatt, Morisot visited a large-scale exhibition of Japanese prints organized by the prominent art dealer Siegfried Bing at the École des Beaux-Arts. … Additionally, in an 1891 letter to Morisot, Cassatt wrote: 'I spoke of you while choosing with Miyashi [Hayashi Tadamasa] Kiyonaga [ukiyo-e by Torii Kiyonaga],' and Cassatt asks, 'Have you seen the book Goncourt wrote about Utamaro?'. This indicates Morisot was acquainted with the Japanese art dealer Hayashi Tadamasa and may have read Edmond de Goncourt's *Utamaro*, published on June 16 of that same year. Furthermore, according to the diary of Julie Manet, Morisot acquired several ukiyo-e prints from Hayashi in exchange for Morisot's own work." (2014-12: 213, brackets original)

Of particular interest is the following, which may be pertinent to some of the Renoir works that will be examined later. It is something circumstantial but converges with the conclusions to be drawn in the following section of this study—that Renoir, an extremely sociable man, moved about in an environment filled with opportunities to observe and hear of ukiyo-e artists such as Utamaro:

> "Two ukiyo-e prints once owned by Morisot have survived. Although considerably faded, they have been identified as a three-panel nishiki-e (c. 1781–1818) by Rekisentei Eiri (Chōkyōsai Eiri) depicting brine-scooping women based on the Noh play *Matsukaze*, and one print titled 'She Prefers Books' from Kitagawa Utamaro's six-print series of beauties, *Six Jewel Faces of Edo* (*Edo Roku Tamagao*, c. 1801–04). Those who were invited to Berthe's home at 40 rue de Villejust (now rue Paul Valéry), where she lived from the winter of 1883, recalled that her high-ceiling salon-cum-atelier featured Empire-style furniture alongside splendid Japanese folding screens and ukiyo-e prints." (2014-12: 214, parentheses original)

Jean Renoir, in his biography of his father, describes how much his father enjoyed Morisot's Thursday soirées, that he "loved spending an hour or two at the house in rue de Villejust." (J. Renoir, 1962: 268) Thus even if Renoir himself was not a vocal advocate of the Japonisme movement, there is no denying he was surrounded by its adherents and quite soaked—virtually submerged—in it socially and intellectually. It should also be clear by now the appellation of "Japanese" to the Batignolles group, whether referring to its original members or the wider circle of artists and writers, was not "meaningless" as some standard works on Impressionism claim Castagnary believed (e.g., B. Thomson, *Impressionism*, 2nd edition, 2026). What bound this motley group of Realists, Naturalists, and budding Impressionists together was in no small part the Japanese link.

According to the aforementioned Gérald van der Kemp, the influence of Japanese prints upon Monet and his associates was expressed in a variety of ways—"c'est Monet pour sa touche rapide [his rapid brushstrokes] et 'son monde flottant' [his floating world], c'est Degas et ses extraordinaires mises en page [his extraordinary layouts] et ses perspectives plongeantes [his plunging perspectives], c'est Manet et ses couleurs à plat [his flat (planes of) color]"—among other contributions to the modern styles (Aitken and Delafond, 1998: 7). Or as Zola asserted about the avant-garde painters in his essay 'Le Naturalisme au salon' (*Le Voltaire*, 18-22 juin 1880):

> "They were rightly accused of having drawn inspiration from Japanese prints
> —so interesting—that are in the possession of all today."

This is often translated into English much more mildly, so the original shall also be provided: "On les a accusés avec raison de s'être inspirés des gravures japonaises, si intéressantes, qui sont aujourd'hui entre toutes les mains." (In J.-P. Bouillon, ed., *Le Bon combat,* 1974: 213-214) Now if the reader might return to Fantin-Latour's painting once more, keeping in mind what has been said, it may appear in a new light.

Part II

Up to this point, we have dwelt upon the world of Japanese objects and decorative influences—the impact of 'kogei aesthetics' on Renoir's chromatic sensibilities. But that would not give us a full picture of 'Renoir's Japonisme'. We have seen much 'frosting'—but only half, or should we say a third, of what constituted the 'filling'. And unless we look to these other aspects of his relationship to Japanese art, we may not be fully convinced of the former, nor appreciate how decorative approaches worked in tandem with other Japanese designs in the making of his artistry.

We are speaking of thematic, compositional, and figural adaptations, a few of which we have already seen as they relate to the decorative features of his work, but now we look further, and see how Japanese artistic models were applied to his conceptions of nudes, social genre, and landscapes. That process, it will be argued, would culminate in his absorption of Eastern graphic art sensibilities as well. The final, major aspect of Japanese influence, Renoir's philosophical alignment with what he imagined Japan to be, will be left to the end—synthesizing and shedding light on the arts and crafts illustrated in the preceding sections.

The Interlocking of Mood Shaping Elements—Line, Pattern, Layout, and Motif

As Oshima notes regarding Maurice Sérullaz's overview of the Impressionist movement, *L'Impressionnisme* (1961), various paintings by Renoir, including his 'The First Outing' (1876-77, National Gallery, London), 'After the Luncheon' (1879, Städel Museum, Frankfurt), 'Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando' (1879, Art Institute of Chicago, alluded to earlier), and 'La Place Clichy' (c. 1880, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) are raised as instances of the artist's use of Japanese compositional techniques. Sérullaz comments how in contrast to the acceptance of Degas and Lautrec's spatial shifting as being inspired by Japanese prints, this is "something that surprises people in the case of Renoir" (in Oshima, 1992: 189-190). The Fitzwilliam Museum, at the University of Cambridge, which holds 'La Place Clichy', describes:

> "The blurring of the background crowd scene against the more clearly defined principal figure may owe something to photography, although the steep perspective also suggests that he may have been influenced by Japanese ukiyo-e." (french-impressionists.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

As for 'After the Luncheon'—and we should add Renoir's 'Conversation' (1879, Nationalmuseum Stockholm)—these are composed with an ukiyo-e style layout approach reminiscent of Kitagawa Utamaro. On the following page, two examples of Utamaro's characteristic de-centering, bold cropping, unconventional framing, and flattened pictorial space are provided for comparison from the lithographer Henri Rivière's collection of Japanese prints (now held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, in their department of prints and photos).

On the left is 'Chirinuruwowaka' (1802, BnF), from the series *Iroha zoroe*, which demonstrates a remarkable modernity of conception considering it was designed in the first years of 19th century. It shares with Renoir's 'Conversation' (1879, Nationalmuseum Stockholm), shown below it, not only its organizational approach, but the doting fondness of the woman for her male companion as well. This is charmingly expressed in Utamaro and in Renoir with different gestures of the gathering of the hands towards the men. Both also adeptly convey the male figure's less ardent interest in his female counterpart, and their avoidance of eye contact with the women.

To the right is 'Matsubaya Seyama Iroka Yukari' (1793, BnF), from the series *Mu-tamagawa* (translated as 'Six Jewel Rivers' at the MFA Boston). Here the kimonos of the two female courtesans spread out in a space where wall and floor merge into one golden plane. One in the forefront facing away from us is a child in apprenticeship with toys nearby, the other a sister or mother-like figure; their kimonos spread out in multiple directions. The impression received from this image might be compared to 'Madam Monet and her Son Jean in the Garden at Argenteuil' (1874, National Gallery of Art, DC) shown below it.

Lesley Stevenson, in her *Renoir* (1991) sees this painting of a mother and son outdoors as a prime example of Renoir's incorporation of Japanese compositional and spatial ambiguities:

> "Renoir has represented the figures of Camille Doncieux and Jean Monet from above and the effect is of a very enclosed environment. In this very flat, two-dimensional picture space he has used the kind of spatial ambiguities that French artists found in Japanese prints. Indeed, the decorative aspect of the work is quite stunning and all of the objects contained within the picture space are carefully balanced. The rooster is introduced to this end and the red of its comb reacts to dramatic effect with the bright green grass." (1991: 82)

Utamaro, Chirinuruwowaka, 1802, BnF

Utamaro, Matsubaya Seyama Iroka Yukari, 1793, BnF

The boy, Monet's son, shown below to the right, with his spread legs, achieves the effect of Utamaro's girl in the foreground with her back to us, sprawled on her front side with her kimono spreading to the edge of the picture frame like the boy's feet. Madame Monet corresponds to the larger figure in Utamaro's print, with the cropping of the kimono on the right edge echoed in Renoir's cropping of the dress on the bottom edge; and whether or not with this specific print in mind, the allusive nature of the picture to Japanese ukiyo-e is suggested by the sensu fan in Mme. Monet's hand, with its classic Japanese-style tripartite diagonal bleeding pattern, arched in layers from top left to lower right, the center white or uncolored, which has often been assumed to be of French manufacture as it coincides with the national flag's tricolor, but can be identified as Japanese in the Monet painted 'La Japonaise' where the mikazuki crescent can be spotted in the red swath (see Appendix for further discussion).

Renoir, Conversation, 1879, Nationalmuseum Stockholm

Renoir, Madam Monet and her Son … at Argenteuil, 1874, National Gallery of Art

And if we wish to pursue these correspondences further, we may observe that the rooster stands rigidly upright, and serves, as the toys in 'Matsubaya Seyama Iroka Yukari', to provide a separate, tertiary point of reference and anchor—without which the two figures in both pictures would appear almost utterly afloat in space. Stevenson follows with further commentary on the influence of Monet, though that too, in this case, might be considered something in part nurtured by his absorption of Japanese compositional principles. The pose of the boy is also reminiscent of a Hokusai manga figure (in *Manga* Vol. 1, 1814) which seems to have fascinated a number of Impressionist painters from Édouard Manet to Mary Cassatt (image and commentary in Appendix).

Utamaro's 'Oshichi the Greengrocer's Daughter, Kichisaburo the Boy Servant, and Dozaemon Denkichi' (1798-1800, MFA Boston), from the series *Models of Love Talk: Clouds Form over the Moon*, shown next (center), skillfully creates a sense of deep psychological divide between the two young figures and the older male directly behind them, despite their close

clustering. This is achieved not only by the contorted expression of the male looking in a different direction, but also by the device of the 'fusuma' or sliding panel, which allows such an effect more easily than a thick swinging door would among standing people (a technique applied more literally by Degas).

This ukiyo-e 'disjointedness in proximity' is employed by Renoir in his 'Au café' (c. 1877, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands), the first painting that comes to mind, shown below, right (the public domain image has been tint adjusted here to approach the original, which is much more blue/green). The intimacy of the two women—their faces as if pressed together, in their own, empathetic world, while the men hover about nearby, looking or moving in different directions and planes—is very much in the Utamaro style.

But so too, and more successfully, though less immediately evident and with greater impact, does his earlier and better known 'La Loge' (1874, Courtauld Institute of Art, London) create such an effect of psychological disjointedness by the same methods. A woman in a vertically striped dress (Renoir's model Nini Lopez) is with her male companion (modeled by Renoir's brother) just behind her. He is crammed in, literally 'boxed' in to the upper right-hand corner, just as the fusuma panel and outer frame of the picture do to the man (Denkichi) in Utamaro.

Renoir, La Loge, 1874
© The Courtauld Institute of Art

Utamaro, Oshichi, Kichisaburo, Denkichi, 1798-1800
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Renoir, Au café, c. 1877
Kröller-Müller Museum, image Wikimedia Commons

The main female subject in Renoir looks at us, so at least there is a sympathetic pairing with the viewer, and an ostracization of the male figure, of 'us' (the woman and the viewer) versus him. This is the same effect achieved in Utamaro by the cheek-to-cheek intimacy of the couple completely oblivious to the man behind them, who is being shut off by the fusuma sliding panel, and the sense of ostracization is of course evident in his unsociable expression and augmented by his glance in the opposite direction, despite being in extreme proximity. In Renoir's formulation, not only is the male character staring off in another direction, but the device of the binoculars obviously increases the sense of emotional distance from his female companion. We should add that Renoir has further accentuated—if not exaggerated—the bold alternation of clearly demarcated areas of thick, solid dark versus light values found in Utamaro. Concentrated onto the figures with little else in the pictures, they command our attention and enliven the 'existential' sense of presence of those persons.

The contribution of Japanese-style tight, up-close cropping, with vividly diverging angles and asymmetry, in combination with starkly contrasting values, is critical in producing the unique affective and aesthetic impact of 'La Loge'—without which we would simply have another fine realist work. Imagine, for a moment, the viewpoint set back significantly in an compositional style before the arrival of Japanese prints: we would end up with a pretty, picturesque row of theater boxes and the man with the binoculars giving it a touch of 18th century style caricature.

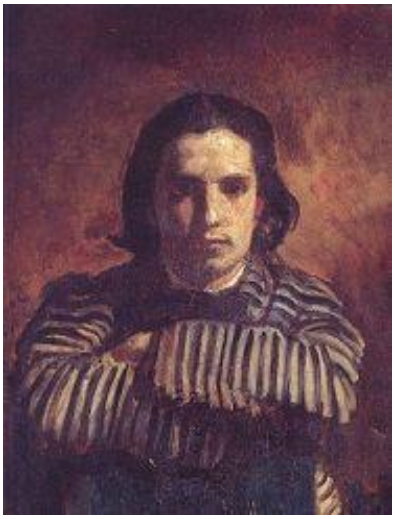
Little attention, by the way, has been paid to the possibility that the phenomenal popularity of vertical stripes at the time may have been fanned by the importation of Japanese kimonos and their prominent depiction in ukiyo-e prints. This might shed more light on the significance of the striped dress in 'La Loge'—if she was flaunting her modernity in the sense associated with Japan; for japonisme was no less important in the development of modern fashions than it was in modern art. A good amount of work has been conducted by researchers such as Akiko Fukai (director of the Kyoto Costume Institute) on the subject. The milestone 1996 Paris exposition 'Japonisme et Mode 1870-1996', held at the Palais Galliera, traced that general influence from before the time of Renoir's 'La Loge' to recent history. Arisa Yamaguchi's *Sartorial Japonisme and the Experience of Kimonos in Britain 1865-1914* (Routledge, 2024) tracks the process from early on in Britain, indicating it was a widespread phenomenon in Western Europe.

Japanese designs—from actual kimonos, katagami stencil patterns, and/or ukiyo-e prints—were seeping into Parisian fashions from the 1860s onward, as Esther Sünderhauf relates in 'The Influence of Japonism on the Parisian Fashion Journals 1860-1900' (Von Parish Costume Library, Münchner Stadtmuseum, 2020). Designs incorporating vertical stripes are given as examples by Sünderhauf, such as 'Beach costume' (Fig. 6a), and 'Dress with stripes in blue and brown' (Fig. 12a).

The point here is not who invented the stripe; nor even that they existed as fashionable wear in an earlier era, but whether back then in an age of kimono japonaiserie and later japonisme we can ignore the vogue for the East among elites in evaluating what came to be considered stylish wear. That is to say, it is one thing to establish stripes might have existed in the West before the coming of Japonisme, and quite another thing to explain why in full-length they became so fashionable among status-conscious women with its arrival; but most importantly, why they were chosen to be emphasized by artists—who have their own objectives in choosing settings and appearances (for further discussion of this relatively complex subject see Appendix).

Two prints shown below, one by Utagawa Kuniyoshi and another by Utagawa Kunitomi (国富, c. 1804-1844), are representative of the bold stripes that were a popular ukiyo-e motif. As in Renoir's 'La Loge', they are often portrayed in a massed, bulky form, accentuating the visual impact of the stripes. In the case of the 'Benkei stripes' to the left, flower-like balls ('bonten', 梵天) on a wide band ('kesa', 袈裟) are worn hanging down on the chest somewhat reminiscent of the ermine stole and pink flowers over the bodice in 'La Loge'. We have placed Gilbert Alexandre de Séverac's **'**Portrait of Claude Monet' (1865, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris) between them, because coincidence or not—though the 'parallels' go beyond the stripes to various aspects of the painting—the displaying of the sleeve emphasizes the stripes in a wonderfully similar manner to Kuniyoshi's print. This likeness, by the way, of a dashing and handsome Monet in his youth was one of a select number of works Monet acquired for his own private collection.

Kuniyoshi, Danjuro as Musashinobo Benkei, 1849
The Japonisme Museum, Kyoto



de Séverac, Portrait Claude Monet, 1865
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, image theartstory.org

Kunitomi, Ogiya no uchi Hanaogi, c. 1820-44
The Japonisme Museum, Kyoto

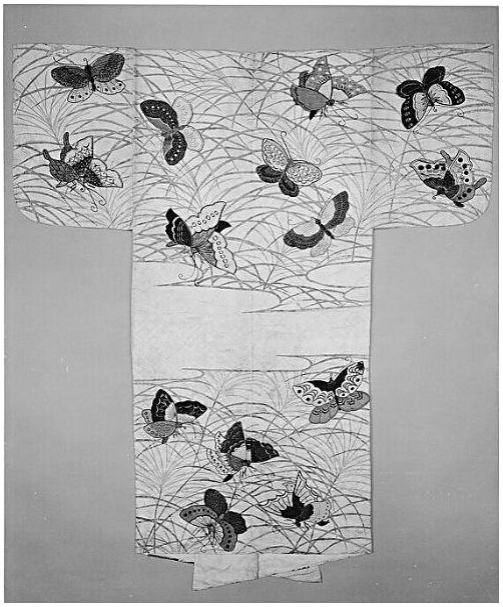
Whether or not this particular fashion and Renoir's choice to paint it was a result of Japanese influence, it is certain the interest in kimonos was growing in France at and before that time, exemplified by the increasing number of stage performances in Japanese or Japan-inspired dress. Zacharie Astruc, sitting with Manet in the Fantin-Latour painting we saw earlier, wrote a Japanese fantasy *L'Île de la Demoiselle,* performed in front of private audiences from 1865; Léon de Rosny's *Le Couvent du Dragon Vert,* said to be based on a Japanese play, was staged publicly at the Athénée Oriental in 1871. Camille Saint-Saëns followed with an opéra-comique, *La Princesse Jaune* (1872), about a Japanese princess. And around the same time Renoir was painting 'La Loge', Ernest d'Hervilly's one-act play in verse, *La Belle Saïnara,* was first performed on March 11, 1874, for the Charpentiers in a private showing, and for the general public two years later (Virginie Meyer, 'Charpentier Georges', Institut national d'histoire de l'art, at agorha.inha.fr/detail/567). More on the subject can be found in Hiroshima Jogakuin University Professor Ronald D. Klein's 'Images of Meiji Japan on the Western Stage' [Acts I & II] (*Eigo Eibei bungaku kenkyu,* No. 19, 2011: 1-38).

Japanese fashions may have found their way not only at the theater, but even to the circus, and thus into Renoir's paintings. His 'The Clown' (1868, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo) is a memorable portrait of a true-life professional clown, John Price, who wears a costume of striking design where enormous golden butterflies with bodies of red or orange are scattered over a jet black backdrop, probably a quite faithful transcription of Price's actual outfit as it appears in a circa 1860 photo of him, also holding a violin. The butterfly pattern is not a traditional clown's garb in Europe; rather, it might remind the knowledgeable reader of the design on kimono, ukiyo-e, or cloisonné vases—a simplified version of them.

The butterfly was a prominent motif in Japan, not only because insects in general—whether butterfly, dragonfly, or even spiders—were seen as appropriate subject matter for art more so than in the West, but the butterfly especially, because of its role in dance and drama. The Butterfly Dance—'Kocho-no-mai', a mainstay of 'Bugaku' or imperial court dance, goes back to Heian times, woven into the narrative of the 11th century *Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu (eulogized by the likes of Virginia Woolf and Claude Lévi-Strauss, and arguably the world's first true novel), to which much of the aesthetic sensibility of the 19th century Japanese art that reached the shores of Europe owes its roots.

Next to Renoir's 'The Clown' is a 17th century Japanese 'Noh robe (Nuihaku) with Design of Butterflies and Miscanthus Grass in Mist' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which displays a similar design of the insect in flight, and shares the stylized approach of the clown's outfit, but with greater variety of angle, movement, and coloring (though unfortunately the MET only has this monochrome image readily available).

Renoir, The Clown, 1868, Kröller-Müller Museum



Anon., Noh robe (Nuihaku) with Design of Butterflies ..., 17th cent., MET

A further comparison illustrates how the clown costume design could have been equally inspired by Japanese woodblock prints illustrated with butterfly patterned clothing. What follows on the next page is a print by that master of the surimono art, Totoya Hokkei—his 'Hanazono ban-tsuzuki', from the early 19th century, at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Note in the print the kimono to the right on the floor with the motif. Like the clown's attire, the insects are increased to hyperbolic size with eye-grabbing effect, and the highly stylized forms have circles close to the red edges, their bodies depicted as rounded segments with dots somewhat like those on the clown's outfit.

Even closer in terms of composition and color scheme, are butterflies on black lacquer, such as 'fudebako' (ornamented cases for brushes) and later cloisonné vases of incredible sheen, almost matching that of black urushi, produced and exported in good number in the late 19th century, of which those by Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927) represent the zenith of that artisanal evolution (see e.g., pieces at the Kiyomizu Sannenzaka Museum, Kyoto). A further point of interest in the photograph of Price (though not reproduced here) is his dark, angular cap. Atypical for standard clown attire, the headpiece is vaguely reminiscent of a samurai's formal black headdress, one type of 'samurai-eboshi', recalling the well-known photo (c. 1892-1900) by Maurice Guibert of Toulouse-Lautrec holding a Japanese doll and donning Japanese vestments and the 'suieikan' (垂纓冠) headgear of high ranking nobility.

Here Renoir was not directly inspired by a Japanese example, but nevertheless, what gives the painting its unique quality must be said to be in large part due to the character of the butterfly design—its bold conception. In that sense, indirectly, the convergent forces of Japanese graphics permeating French tastes at the time may likewise be considered a japonisme influence upon the fine arts as well. Might we say that Renoir felt the tug of an allure emanating from the same source as that of his Japanese fans, vases, and flowers? Underlying both the radical stripe and gigantic butterflies lies a similar daring and audaciousness—'kibatsu'—a quality which perfectly defines 'The Clown'. From Japan Western artists did not merely learn 'flatness', 'asymmetry' and the usual ho-hum qualities often raised; rather it was a knack for achieving an enhanced sense of flair and a honing of the ability to recognize that elusive quality of 'iconicity' which was also among the many unsung contributions of Japanese art to their aesthetic awareness.

Hokkei, Detail of Hanazono ban-tsuzuki, early 19th century, Freer Gallery

Renoir, Detail of The Clown, 1868

Pursuing this line of fashion-related history any further, however, would open up an entirely new discussion beyond the scope of this study. Only to say in conclusion that the idea of the vertical stripe as ukiyo-e imagery seems to have been so strongly associated in the European artistic imagination that Joan Miró, many years later, still recognized the connection in his painting 'Portrait of E.C. Ricart' (1917, private collection). Depicting a man in a conspicuously striped outfit from head to toe, with a large Japanese print in the background, Miró's painting can be fruitfully compared to Kunisada's 'Iseta Restaurant' from the series *Famous Restaurants of the Eastern Capital* (c. 1852) and to Monet's portrait by de Séverac, closing the wide circle we have drawn that started with Renoir's 'La Loge'.

Returning now to the general influence of ukiyo-e imagery and its delineations on Renoir, Robert Herbert, regarding Renoir's 'Nursing' (or otherwise 'Aline Nursing her Son Pierre'/'Aline and her son Pierre', 1886, private collection, image on p. 52 of this study), relates that:

> "When Renoir's *Nursing* (*Aline and her son Pierre*) was exhibited in 1886, it was greeted by one friendly critic as though he had drawn three of Renoir's favored comparisons from the artist's *Grammar*. He asked the viewer to admire in the picture the charm of the primitives, the clarity of the Japanese and the mastery of Ingres." (*Nature's Workshop*, 2000: 68)

The reference to "the clarity of the Japanese" most likely refers to the clear outlines, distinct colors, and vivid composition of Japanese woodblock prints (characteristics which also remind us of 'La Loge' and 'The Clown'). That is to say, besides Renoir's high regard for Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and the stimulus of the then ascendant Primitivism movement, Renoir may have experimented with the clear definition characteristic of ukiyo-e prints. Probably other paintings of his could be analyzed in the same light, such as 'The Daughters of Catulle Mendès' (1888, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Mendès, it is worth noting, wrote one of the first French sonnets on Japan—an homage to it, 'Ten-si-o-dai-tsin' (i.e., Tensho-daijin/天照大神, 1863; William L. Schwartz, 'Japan in French Poetry', *PMLA*, Vol. 40, No. 2, June 1925, pp. 435-449), and would likely have been pleased to have his daughters painted in a Japanese style. And once again, we encounter a Renoir patron who is an ardent Japanophile.

Other works that bring to mind ukiyo-e images include 'Bust of a Woman with a Yellow Corsage' (c. 1883, private collection, shown on the following page) and 'La Coiffure' (1888, Pola Museum of Art, Hakone, to be discussed later); or as Herbert points out, 'Children's Afternoon at Wargemont' (1884, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin). Concerning this painting he says:

> "Those same three phrases could be used to praise Children's Afternoon at Wargemont painted in 1884 shortly after the artist had mailed the 'Société des Irrégularistes' to Durand-Ruel. It conforms more obviously to the idea of decorative art because the furnishings of a bourgeois interior bring forth tight drawing and clear pattern. The highly colored Caucasian carpet on the table and the chintz draperies behind it are quite flat, echoing Japanese prints, so the picture has a folkloric or 'primitive' feeling, even a toylike aspect appropriate to the subject, including the visual pun of a doll held by a doll-like child." (Ibid.)

Bust of a Woman with a Yellow Corsage, c. 1883
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Children's Afternoon at Wargemont, 1884
Alte Nationalgalerie

Claude Keisch, Senior Curator at the Alte Nationalgalerie (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) where the Wargemont painting is held, recognizes in the Museum description of the piece that:

> "The many different patterns, as on a Japanese woodcut, underline the unity of the picture surface."
> (Museum Online Research at recherche.smb.museum)

Another painting to be considered in this grouping is 'La Promenade' (1875-76, Frick Collection, New York), shown below, which conjures print images of Yoshiwara courtesans accompanied by two 'kamuro' or child attendants/apprentices, such Torii Kiyomitsu II's 'Miyoharu of Sanomasuya with kamuro Midori and Sasano' (early to mid-19th century) shown to its left, or Utagawa Toyokuni II's (known also as Toyoshige) 'Kashiku of the Tsuruya with kamuro Fudeji and Someji' (c. 1802-35) to its right. This is to name but two artists active in this genre, which includes, for instance, the likes of Chobunsai Eishi (e.g., 'Karauta of the Chojiya with kamuro Kameji and Namiji', 1796/97) as well.

As in 'La Promenade', the figures of the courtesan and their doll-like attendant girls are somewhat flattened, like paper-cut figures pasted together, their robes merging into one (sometimes one of the little attendants even holds a toy of some sort). Note in Toyoshige's print to the right the textile design—coincidentally reminding us of the ubiquitous nature of the oversized butterfly motif in Japanese apparel. Finally, look again at 'Children's Afternoon at Wargemont' in relation to Toyoshige's image: the toylike aspect, the flatness, the different patterns that underlie the picture surface in both. We find the words of Claude Keisch and Robert Herbert ring true, and everything seems to fall in place.

Kiyomitsu II, Miyoharu of the Sanomasuya, early/mid-19th c.
with kamuro Midori and Sasano, MFA Boston

Renoir, La Promenade, 1875–76
Frick Collection, NY, image Wikimedia Commons

Toyoshige, Kashiku of the Tsuruya, c. 1802-35
with kamuro Fudeji and Someji, MFA Boston

Some of Renoir's rough sketches may also suggest the possible influence of Japanese draftsmanship. Monneret, for instance, hints that this may be the case with his 'Study of a Tree' (1886, location unspecified) which "is reminiscent of Japanese stylization" (*Renoir*, 1990: 108). Castellani finds in his 'Fisherman' (c. 1867-69, Durand-Ruel Archives, Paris) that "The line delineates the forms with an elegance that reminds one of Japanese graphic art" (*Renoir: His Life and Works*, 1998: 15). While in some of Renoir's underdrawings, faces have an aspect vaguely evoking the Far East, such as those of the monochrome etching c. 1894 second plate of 'Le Chapeau épinglé'; as does a charcoal sketch 'Head of a Woman' (in Schneider, 1967: 69, date and location not given), probably in preparation for his 'Girl with a Straw Hat' (c. 1884, private collection); or his 'Femme allaitant son enfant' (date and location not given, originally Renoir Collection, in G. Rivière, 1921: 54), among other sketches, such as for his nude groups, a quality lost in the finished paintings.

Floral Japonisme

Whatever the case with the examples above, such influences should not be considered implausible. An interest in drawing faces, figures, clothing, or wildlife in the Japanesque manner with "strange elegance" and "magnificent strokes", to borrow the words of Zola, can be seen in painters from Manet to Moreau, Gauguin to Lautrec, and even in Fantin-Latour's copying of Toyokuni figures. Manet, whose example the rest of the Batignolles group were not impervious to, was interested in the "Japanese theory of drawing" (according to Whistler, as Frank Whitford notes), signs of which surfaced not only in his etchings as saleable artworks, but in his private drawings that "also show an interest in Japan, especially those brush studies of plants and flowers with which he occasionally decorated his correspondence." Whitford adds that a standing Spanish figure (c. 1862, Rouart Collection, Paris) "shares much with Japanese brush sketches" and "his illustrations to Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* are adapted from Hokusai's *Manga*." (Whitford, 1977: 122) The quick simple sketches Manet included in his letters indicate a particular interest in the Japanese manner of drawing plant forms, something Renoir, and also Morisot, seem to have shared.

Renoir, Lily and Greenhouse Plants, 1864
Museum Oskar Reinhart Am Römerholz, Winterthur

Utamaro, Picture Book of Selected Insects (Ehon mushi erami), 1788
Watson Library Digital Collections, MET

One of Renoir's earliest paintings, 'Lily and Greenhouse Plants' (1864, Museum Oskar Reinhart) is shown above with a page from Utamaro's well-known album of insects and plants, *Picture Book of Selected Insects* (*Ehon mushi erami*, 1788, MET), one of the earliest woodblock print albums to have reached Europe (e.g., the accession of the Joseph Banks copy at the British Museum dates to 1827, after having been in Banks' possession for decades). The large lily in Renoir's work reappears in modified form in his 'Rapha Maître' we saw earlier, but with the viewing angle rotated.

In traditional Chinese painting, reaching back before the Tang and attaining a zenith of development in the Song Dynasty era, 'flowers and birds' was one of the basic major genres of color and ink pictures, which was transmitted to Japan and became one of the most popular forms of graphic art, the 'kacho-ga' (花鳥画), perhaps more so than 'mountain and water' or 'sansui' landscapes (山水画)—somewhat in contrast to China—though both genres were popular in those countries. The mixing of plant and bird forms was also a common motif on ceramics imported from China and Japan in the 17th and 18th centuries to Europe, having no small impact on Western decorative art, as hinted at earlier. Though called 'arabesques'

(which applies to a certain extent even in the case of China and Japan in a very ancient sense), the direct source of intertwining bird and floral forms in Europe can be correctly understood as emanating primarily from the Far East. It should be added that Japan too may be said to have had its own age of 'chinoiserie' in the Muromachi period of the 15th century, analogous in some senses to what would occur in Europe later, a decorative taste for Chinese art among the ruling classes, which can be considered as something separate from the more profound influence which came centuries earlier. This is all to simplify a much more complex plot in a limited amount of space, but with that understood, these Chinese influences combined with indigenous tendencies to produce truly engaging, life-like 'flower and bird' works by painters such as Ito Jakuchu (1716-1800). While the mainstay of aesthetic production would be sustained by an extensive network of artisans across the country, naturally the highest levels of artistry were concentrated in certain regions such as Kyoto—where superb decorative works with avian-floral motifs were created—that became the loci of what would become the crafts export industry in the Meiji era.

Returning to Renoir, often his backdrops are indistinct where the details cannot be discerned, but in some instances they are made out in relative clarity so that we can sense his interest in rendering exotic forms, reminiscent of the 'flower and bird' genre of Far Eastern painting. The Ashmolean Museum exhibition 'Threads of Silk and Gold: Ornamental Textiles from Meiji Japan' (Nov 2012- Jan 2013) introduced to the public a type of export product unknown to most scholars and informed audiences of the present day: embroidered drapes for use as wall hangings, much in the way of tapestries. Indeed, they can be said to be de facto tapestries functioning in the Victorian age as Flemish ones did in the High Middle Ages and Renaissance—though this time marketed to the broad middle classes. After noting the wide range of Meiji export goods, the Ashmolean commentary explains:

> "Also enormously popular at the time, but little known today, were non-costume Japanese textiles that were made specifically for the Western market as art objects or for interior decoration. These exquisite embroideries, dyed silk and velvet panels, tapestries, and appliqué works became some of Japan's best-known export items. No fashionable Victorian home was without its Japanese drapes and hangings."
> (www.ashmolean.org/event/threads-of-silk-and-gold-ornamental-textiles-from-meji-japan).

Woven against any number of backdrop colors, they are a true decorative fantasy from which a novel could be spun, employing Japanese artisanal skill and traditional motifs with an unrivalled flamboyance intended to appeal to a Western audience with an appetite for the exotic.

Renoir, Pierre-Henri Renoir, 1870, private coll.
Image Wikimedia Commons

Illustrated by É. Bayard, et al., Detail of A Physician's Visit, 1870
Aimé Humbert, *Le Japon illustré*, Hachette & Cie

Renoir, Madame Pierre-Henri Renoir, 1870
Harvard Art Museums © President and Fellows of Harvard College

A probable example of such a drapery, which once again admonishes us that a familiarity with Japanese art of all kinds is necessary for a true appreciation of the range of Renoir's motifs and symbolism, is his pair of portraits of his older brother Henri and his wife, Blanche-Marie. The background elements have been understood as symbolizing the interest of the couple in the East, but their precise identity has not been sufficiently pursued; however, enough can be made out of the avian and floral forms to surmise they are quite possibly Japanese export draperies. In fact, a very similar design can be found in an illustration in Aimé Humbert's *Le Japon illustré*, published in the same year, 1870, by Hachette & Cie, and translated into various other European languages (the image above is from the D. Appleton & Co., New York version, 1874: 204), indicating this kind of decor was clearly associated with Japan.

The Christie's lot essay regarding the portrait of Henri Renoir points out that

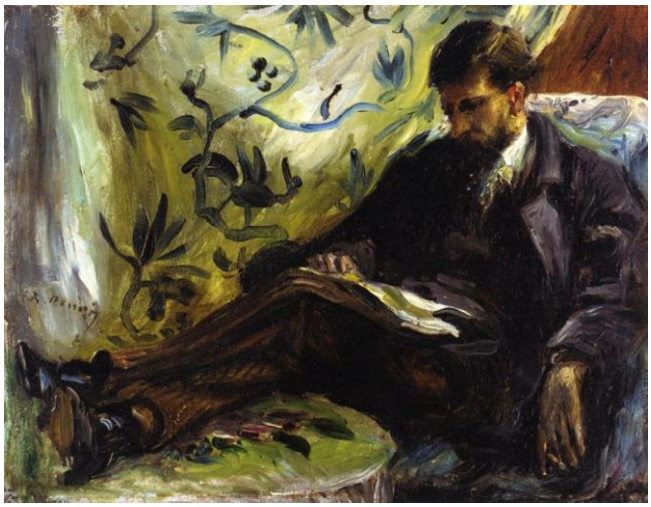
> "This possibly began Renoir's interest in *Japonisme*, which would become so vital to Renoir and the Impressionists. It is a tribute to his respect for his brother's taste that the background of *Portrait de Pierre-Henri Renoir* features ornamental decorations that recall this type of exuberance. … The decorations to the right of his head in particular appear to be filled with a strong and colourful bird motif, like two peacocks. This adds to the sheer gusto and presence of *Portrait de Pierre-Henri Renoir*, placing it firmly at the top of the Impressionist portraiture tradition, and also of the French portraiture tradition itself. " (Live Auction 7188, Essay for Lot 62, 6 Feb 2006)

Given that auction house essays are written with a propensity to inflate the unique artistic value of a work with which the monetary value rises in tandem, nevertheless, it is not without a grain of truth that the portrait is an early work faintly intimating an Impressionist sensibility, especially the decorative surface we have been discussing; though the identity of the birds is not clear; perhaps peacocks, but possibly phoenixes, pheasants, or even roosters (see e.g., 'Rooster and Flowering Tree', Japan, late 19th century, cotton panel, resist dyed on an indigo ground, mounted as a double screen, presumed to originally be a bedcover, at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Canada, in Stanley-Baker, 1984: 172). Colin Bailey also makes a reference to japonisme ("the couple's enthusiasm for japonisant decoration" *Renoir's Portraits*, 1997: 106) regarding the backdrop in Madame Henri Renoir's portrait, which is no doubt the same drapery as that depicted in her husband's from a slightly different angle and a somewhat different section of it. The rich red within the weaving contrasted with dark colors finds its way throughout both pictures, and may have been the 'anchor' around which the interior décor was coordinated—and the basis of Renoir's chromatic schema for the painting.

More examples related to this idea of japonisant allusions may be found in the backdrop of other portraits by Renoir. In a discussion of Renoir's friends that included Duret, Manet, and Edmond Maître, who had "a taste for Japanese art", Barbara Ehrlich White, a long-time Renoir researcher of his work as it relates to his personal life, describes in her *Renoir: His Life, Art, and Letters* (1984) that the painter, with the news of his good—perhaps best—friend Frédéric Bazille's death in battle, relocated to become a close neighbor of Edmond Maître in Paris:

> "He took a room on the rue Dragon, near Maître's apartment, and soon afterwards he painted Maître relaxing indoors, against an exotically flowered drapery, reflecting the vogue for japonisme that held sway in Paris for much of the latter part of the century." (1984: 39)

Monet, Detail of La Japonaise, 1876
MFA Boston



Renoir, Edmond Maître, 1871
Private collection, image Wikiart

Gown of William III, 1675-1702
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

We can infer that the inclusion of the motif, not unlike that in the upper half of the garment in 'La Japonaise' by Monet, symbolizing the vogue at the time, was meant to represent Maître's interests to be so prominently featured. This type of floral design was already associated with Japan for centuries—observe the pattern of the 'Housecoat' or 'Robe or Japanese Gown of Prince William III' (c. 1675-c.1702, Rijksmuseum), shown right. It is typical of 'Japonse rokken' ('rokken' being the plural of 'rok', or gown) that were popular in the late 17th and 18th centuries among European elites, and exhibits a similar flair for swirling vines with large leaves.

Despite the random appearance of things in portraiture painting, they are staged affairs contrived to look natural, as a film director stages the set of a movie—except that the painter is more conscious of every element, of its symbolic meaning and aesthetic function, because the focus stays fixed for eternity on one 'frame' alone. Even when it is something partially hidden, such as for instance, the Imari vase in Ingres' 'Madame Moitessier' (the seated portrait of her, 1856, The National Gallery, London)—the one objet d'art of great value in the painting, a mark of aristocratic, old-money sophistication resonating in color scheme and meaning with the sitter's garment (likely custom-made to evoke the same associations but

overdone)—it is key to understanding the picture's intended meaning, as well as revealing of the sitter's bourgeois strivings for something higher.

Returning to Renoir's picture, assuming that such a drapery did exist in Maître's room, nevertheless, for Maître and Renoir to agree to use it as the backdrop, and, as we have said, to give it such prominence, means it cannot be taken lightly. The decision to paint it in exceptionally clear, vivid outlines—when so many of Renoir's portraits leave backdrops a complete guessing game or at least somewhat indistinct—indicates the drapery pattern is to be firmly associated with the subject's persona, and furthermore, that Renoir himself possessed a strong desire to delineate and emphasize that aspect of the composition. Or, in other words, to try his hand at a style of brushwork akin to that of Oriental draftsmanship, as in sumi-e (ink-wash), to convey a sense of the life-force of plants (as Manet did) in spontaneous, asymmetric, and writhing singular brushstrokes that retain a sense of the painter's hand movement.

Renoir, of course, is known for his love of natural vitality and fecundity, whether it be plant or human, but his approach is usually incremental, accretive, continually reworked, and aggregative in its means. But here his brush steps closer to the spirit of Eastern painting. A sumi-e by Ike no Taiga (1723–1776), one of the most acclaimed of the bunjinga artists, is shown below for comparison, demonstrating the 'ikioi' or life-force and drawing momentum typical of such sumi-e paintings—and to a certain extent the drapery design in the portrait of Maître.

Taiga, Cycad, ink on paper on a hanging scroll, mid-18th century, MET

Renoir, An Anonymous Sitter, 1875
Private collection, image Wikiart

The floral design in Maître's portrait might be compared to a motif in another of his paintings done some four or so years later, 'Portrait of an Anonymous Sitter' (1875, private collection), described in Colin Bailey, et al., *Renoir's Portraits: Impressions of an Age* (1997) thus:

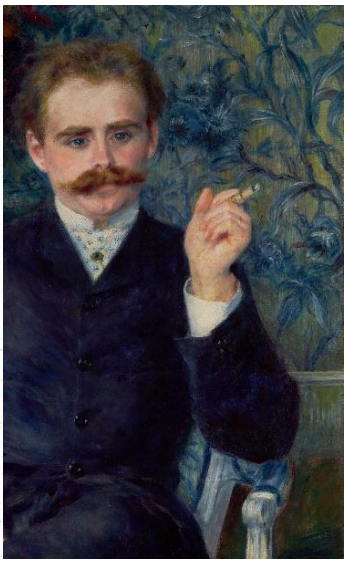
> "With her imposing chestnut hair piled high in a bun and falling just below her shoulder, Renoir's sitter poses somewhat tentatively in a simple day-dress enlivened by an array of jewels—earrings, a gold neckband, a ruby-studded brooch, and two rings on her left hand. She is seated on a slipper chair covered in a patterned fabric that matches the wall hanging at left. And in keeping with Renoir's understated inclusion of fashionable Japanese motifs, she holds an uchiwa fan in both hands." (p. 140)

The uchiwa fan once again sets the tone of the chromatic scheme, just as in the first painting we looked at with the fan in the vase. Here too, Renoir distributes the same hues of the uchiwa to the wall hanging on the left (which may well be a Japanese export drapery) and the patterned fabric to the right, encircling, so to speak, the anonymous female sitter; and the similarly colored scarf on this lady of refined modesty ties them all together. What is of particular interest is that the fan design, drawn in free, bold strokes, is not so different in spirit to the wall hanging design; and in turn, that wall hanging is of a style and spirit not so dissimilar to that of the drapery in Maître's portrait with its winding branches or stems, and though each leaf or bud is less distinctly rendered, it still commands our attention as it works its way up the drapery upon which it is drawn.

We must look at one more portrait done by Renoir, perhaps the most important in this discussion of floral forms and patterns, that of 'Albert Cahen d'Anvers' (1881, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles). While the design is one distinctly associated with what was considered Japanese flair in floral designs at the time, most commentaries on this portrait seem to bypass a detailed investigation of it, except in how it echoes the imagery of the sitter:

> "Facial hair was regarded as a powerful indicator of male sexuality, and Renoir shows Cahen d'Anvers's curled mustache echoing the wallpaper's curves, his ruffled red hair referring to the potted plant's feathery leaves." (from www.getty.edu, object 103QRV)

Fraipont, *L'album japonais, Motifs inédits de décoration japonaise,* 2nd ed., 1880
Illustrations based on traditional Japanese designs, Columbia University



Renoir, Albert Cahen d'Anvers, 1881
Detail of right side, J. Paul Getty Museum

Hokusai, *Hokusai Gaen*, 1843
In C. Dresser, 1882

However, that the design goes beyond the traditional Rococo chinoiserie of the 18th century in its curves and asymmetry is something which can be discerned, just as two faces can be described by the same adjectives and yet appear entirely different. If one should claim, for instance, that their eyes are 'asymmetrical', their noses curving in a 'C shape', their hair in 'S shapes', and add a variety of other adjectives to the list, those two individuals, when met in person, could nevertheless be starkly contrasting in impression, and that difference we would be capable of immediately recognizing with confidence thereafter, just as we can with artistic styles, or a curly blonde-haired woman with an oval face and blue eyes by Botticelli versus one by Titian.

Sandwiching a section of Renoir's painting with the floral motif, on the left is an illustration from Gustave Fraipont's popular *L'album japonais: Motifs inédits de décoration japonaise* (1880, 2nd edition, Plate 15). Published before Cahen's sitting, the image represents a variation on a theme of similar floral designs in that album. And on the right is an illustration from Christopher Dresser's seminal *Japan: Its Architecture, Art, and Manufactures* (1882, Fig. 125), also being but one plate among several of its kind in that book. The former, along with the latter (though published after the painting), have been placed next to the canvas detail as examples of the kind of floral imagery Europeans found novel, instructive, and typical of Japan at the time; and from our perspective we can see that they do share a certain likeness in their bold forms with the wallpaper in the portrait.

> "Wallpaper is a field in which one might have anticipated early manifestations of Japonisme in view of the prominence of Japanese papers suitable for wall coverings that were exhibited in the Paris Exposition of 1878."

—examples of which can be found in the Brunier Collection of the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, as Eidelberg and Johnston noted in 'Japonisme and French Decorative Arts' (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 150). We saw earlier in the case of the Japanese drapery how widespread it was—and yet so unfamiliar for us today—and as the two authors affirm,

> "The French textile industry was certainly affected by Japonisme in the late 1870's and 1880's. Indeed, textiles may have been among the first of Japanese industrial products to have been appreciated in the West." (Ibid.)

The influence of Japanese designs on the French textile industry is also examined in the Mabuchi Akiko supervised *Katagami Style* (2012), and it is reasonable to postulate that the wallpaper in Renoir's painting may have been influenced by such forms, and meant to symbolize the sitter's up-to-date tastes.

Naturally there has been an abundance of floral art over the centuries in Europe, from Renaissance and Baroque Flemish tapestries to Dutch still lifes on to Rococo furnishings—yet there are distinguishable differences between those delineations and what would appear in late 19th century Europe. We cannot delve here into a detailed comparative history of floral motifs East and West, but an attempt to point out defining characteristics of each may help to distinguish and identify the design in question, for what we require is further differentiation beyond generic descriptors of organic form.

The Rococo style, as in furnishing and interior decor, exhibited a playful, stylized asymmetry, emulative of plant shapes on Islamic and Sino-Japanese ceramics, but still possessing a predictable regularity in its curvatures and planarity, characterized generally by a standardized number of leaf and bud forms within one work. Dutch still lifes, while close in some instances to Japanese depictions and more life-like and varied in their extreme detail, still maintain an overall sculptural quality, with what might be called a 'body' of concentrated volumes, from which extend convoluted 'offshoots'. Likewise with Belgian tapestries—even the most ingeniously composed—show a regularity in their clustering, extending planes, and distribution of volumes, and of distances between elements within a single tree or bush, while Baroque floral

depictions in general are relatively dense, and almost viscous. Even if we include Celtic vegetal forms, despite their supple and restless vigor, are more rhythmic in their transformations, rotary in their shapes, and uniplanar than what we see here; while the Perso-Islamic styles are masterfully intricate and tastefully delicate, but also disciplined, planned—expressing the perfection of divinity. These characterizations may be somewhat stereotypical—for there is no way to comprehensively grasp the diversity of any of those traditions, but they probably will not seem, for someone familiar with them, wholly mistaken either.

Japanese floral depictions, on the other hand, as introduced to Europe in the mid-19th century, tended to be more unpredictable in their curving 'acceleration', if you will, and bending aspects of leaf shape; each differing and extending in various planes, where certain parts, be it leaf or bud, were magnified in great detail by heightened foreshortening, shown from contrasting angles. If we may borrow the language of geometry (differential), Japanese floral designs are characterized by more varying 'torsion' (tau)—how sharply a three-dimensional curve twists out of its flat plane; and exhibit sharper and less predictable geometric shifts or discontinuities, with differently angled creases or cusps, combined with a varying degree of overlay. One might say the viewer is invited into the micro-environment within the space the plant occupies, and can experience and savor the elemental relations—between stems, leaves, buds, and often insects or birds—without feeling overwhelmed. In other words, what Japanese art offered to the avant-garde was not merely a new sense of 'flatness' or ambiguity of perspective with simplified forms; it also demonstrated a heightened sensation of three-dimensionality and complexity within diminutive spaces. Japanese flower arrangement, 'ikebana', also exemplifies this conception.

Panaschirte Passionsblume.

Spielarten von Chrysanthemum.

Justus Brinckmann, *Kunst und Handwerk in Japan*, 1889, pp. 9 and 84
Images Harvard University at Hathi Trust

These illustrations from the German scholar Justus Brinckmann's book on Japanese arts and crafts, while published several years after Renoir had completed Cahen's portrait, are typical of traditional Japanese floral designs in the Edo period, and were likely to have been available to Brinckmann for some time before the completion and publication of his lengthy study. His concept of 'Pflanzenwelt' or 'Plantworld' nicely encapsulates the idea discussed above and the European impression received of Japanese floral depictions—as a doorway to a new vision of organicity—which is difficult for us to appreciate, now that the West has so thoroughly investigated that world and made it its own.

Thus, while the wallpaper behind Cahen d'Anvers may be of European manufacture, nevertheless, to the extent its characteristics are discernible, is likely to have been influenced by models of Japanese draftsmanship prevalent at the time, and it may well be the Japanesque qualities of that decorative paper which made it alluring as a backdrop choice. Underpinning the elegance of the picture, all is either form or color coordinated with it—chair upholstery, jacket, shirt, hair, and eyes. Imagine removing the floral design for a moment and replacing it with one of Renoir's ceramic glaze-like backdrops, and we would find the picture less appealing; the sitter's airs would then stand out and verge on pomposity rather than exuding the refinement that they do.

The circumstances surrounding this piece are also of interest, as once again, they are revealing of the degree to which Renoir's social milieu was filled with people knowledgeable about, and avidly collecting, a great variety of Japanese objets d'art. Charles Ephrussi, art critic and chief editor of *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* one of the leading art journals based in Paris, who introduced Renoir to Albert Cahen d'Anvers and others of the Cahen family, was also a Japoniste, and so was Louise Morpurgo, the wife of Albert's older brother Louis Raphaël Cahen, Count Cahen of Anvers. From a wealthy Jewish family, Ephrussi, Renoir's connective node to the Cahens and other patrons, was cultivated and cosmopolitan, educated in Latin, Greek, English, and German, and besides of course French, spoke Russian fluently. He collected Renaissance paintings

and Japanese art, and published a book on Albrecht Dürer's drawings. The online *Dictionary of Art Historians* description of Ephrussi gives us some indication of how a taste for japonisme was an integral part of high society in those days:

> "Both well-educated and among the highest social strata, Ephrussi regularly visited the private salons, hosted by ladies of distinctive families, such as Madame Straus (1849-1926), Princess Mathilde (1820-1904), Madame Lemaire (1845-1928), and Countess Greffulhe (1860-1952). Ephrussi shared with many others an interest in Japanese art objects, including woodcuts, folding screens, lacquer boxes, and *netsuke*. He owned several lacquer boxes and an important *netsuke* collection. In 1878 he published a study on Japanese lacquer boxes on display in the Trocadéro, 'Les laques japonais au Trocadéro' in the *Gazette*." (https://arthistorians.info/ephrussic/)

This included a fine portable cabinet with floral designs in gold lacquer (p. 3 of the article) from the collection of the aforementioned Louise Morpurgo, who was also a collector of Japanese 'urushi' lacquerwares. Some idea of Ephrussi's esteem for Japanese artistry can be gleaned from the article, where he says that when beholding them:

> "you are struck by the extreme delicacy of the work, the richness of the material, the variety of effects achieved, the crispness of the reliefs, and the ingenuity of the composition. You feel you are in the presence of an entirely exotic art; Europe, which has created so many wonders, could never produce anything so consummate; it demands a thoroughly feminine suppleness of hand, a persevering dexterity, and a sacrifice of time that Western nations would not undertake with such easy nonchalance. Only the hardworking Japanese artist, who does not count the hours, can bring this work of enchantment to fruition." (Extrait de *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Dec. 1878, pp. 1-2)

It was possibly for the same reasons that Austrian Empress Maria Theresa and her daughter Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, cherished their urushi collections so (see Monika Kopplin, *Les laques du Japon: Collections de Marie-Antoinette,* Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001; and 'Le Japonisme of Marie Antoinette' at japonisme.org). This taste for things Japanese was the by now time honored mark of the high-born and well-bred, passed on, however tenuously, in lacquer chests and porcelain from earlier ages. Returning now to the design of the wallpaper itself, we can see how décor considered japonisant would be wholly in line with the trend of the times among cultivated elites such as the Ephrussis and Cahens, and we also sense Renoir has taken care to convey the vigorous quality of the floral forms, and not simply mix them into an indistinct color palette as he does with many of his other portraits, as remarked upon earlier (see also 'Alice and Elizabeth d'Anvers' in Bailey, et al., 1997, and footnote 19).

Brushwork Compared, East to West

If we are correct to surmise this was the case with Renoir, such an interest in Far Eastern painting would be expected to extend to his watercolor works, which do at times remind one of the 18th century Japanese literati style of draftsmanship and figuration in the overall impression they convey, encompassing a variety of flora—arboreal, shrub, and grass—filling a landscape. His 'Landscape, Autumnal Effect' (c. 1885-86, collection of David Lachenmann) has a brushstroke suggestive of Japanese painters such as that of Matsumura Goshun (1752-1811), but this is not to assert a specific connection between any particular suibokuga with Renoir. Rather, they will be offered as examples of an affinity of spirit; and shed light on shared conceptions and means of expression, which may, through other similar examples available to Renoir, have had an effect on his methods.

As will be elaborated upon in Part III, Renoir attempted to understand the perceptual process, the observational approach of the Japanese artist, believing all its arts were lessons in artistic authenticity. It is in that sense that we wish to conduct the present segment of this discussion, without claiming to know which particular artworks he saw—for we have until now, and will be later, comparing plenty of images where the parallels speak for themselves. Instead, we cast our vision farther afield to qualities of Japanese aesthetics yet to be explored, seeing paths which lead to Renoir paintings of a different kind from those we have already examined, so as to better comprehend the 'big picture' of his art—and the Impressionist approach in general—for this will bear upon Monet and Degas as well. That is, we intend to undertake the most obvious comparative analysis usually done first and foremost, which for some reason has been bypassed in Western scholarship on japonisme sources, yet is standard fare in any other investigation of artistic influence: that of like medium to like medium—Japanese painting precedents in relation to Impressionist painting antecedents—just as European Old Masters, whether specific paintings or their general qualities, are considered in that light.

Renoir's filling and 'packing' of vegetation onto the canvas, as in his 'Algerian Landscape: Wild Woman Ravine' (1881, Musée d'Orsay), recalls the bunjinga style of dense composition of Goshun or his teacher Yosa Buson (1716-1783); or otherwise Ike no Taiga and his disciples. Goshun's 'Orchid Pavilion Gathering' (c. 1782-89, Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo) follows on the next page as an example of the literati style of a quilt-like patchwork of growth that fills most of the picture plane with clusters of minutely, yet differently formed foliage and shades of color. Van Gogh, for one, reveals the influence of that type of suiboku technique in his 'The Rock of Montmajour with Pine Trees' (1888, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam), which, in the Van Gogh Museum sponsored J*apanese Prints: The Collection of Vincent van Gogh* (Chris Uhlenbeck, et al., 2018: 27) is compared to Fujimoto Tesseki's scroll painting 'An Imaginary Chinese Mountain Landscape' (1848, E. Freis Collection, USA). Something akin to what Van Gogh was experimenting with can also be sensed in some of the Renoir works under consideration here.

The same might be said, allowing, of course, for parallels to Corot, Watteau, or other European painters, of Renoir's 'The Washerwoman' (c. 1891, private collection). The general compositional characteristics and draftsmanship of that work, evocative of ink-wash painting include: the combination of a small, rustic figure at the base of the picture with houses half hidden, nestled in a patchwork of growth above the figure; in a scene of generally dense, yet distinctly varied clusters of foliage; the manner of delicate brushstrokes and graded misty color hues reminiscent of tarashikomi—'dripping into' the paper of watery ink; and certain bushes with emphatic foregrounding and a clear delineation of the branches while the leaves are left indistinct. Other bunjinga paintings not shown here may come closer to Renoir in aspects of motif, as in gentler, more rounded hills, such as those illustrating William Anderson's *The Pictorial Arts of Japan* (1886).

Joan Stanley-Baker, Emeritus Professor of Art History at Tainan National University of Arts, Taiwan, intimately familiar with first China, and then Japan, and one of the oldest living Western scholars of East Asian art, said of Ike no Taiga, and which can to a certain extent be said to apply to the general trend of bunjinga painting: "Taiga transformed the sedate and introspective Chinese scholar-amateur tradition into something thoroughly extrovert, endowing the genre with luminosity and lyricism." (*Japanese Art*, 1984: 175) This must strike a chord with those familiar with the superlatives applied to Renoir—extroverted, luminous, and lyrical.

Goshun, Orchid Pavilion Gathering, color on silk mounted on a hanging scroll c. 1782-89, Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo

What follows is a detail from the left screen of Goshun's 'Woodcutters and Fishermen' (1790-95, MET), which shares something with the previously mentioned 'Landscape, Autumnal Effect' in the rendering of plant forms Renoir places in the foreground, cropped by the left edge. So does Renoir's 'On the Shore of the Seine' (c. 1879, Baltimore Museum of Art) shown on the next page. While not a watercolor, its manner of expression is akin to it, an attempt to combine the powers of oil pigment with the imagery and brushwork of a more fluid medium. Done on the spur of the moment on a linen table napkin at a restaurant, this was, by the way, shortly after Watanabe Seitei had been demonstrating quick stroke, on the spot 'sekiga' paintings at the 1878 Paris world exposition.

Goshun, Woodcutters and Fishermen, c. 1790–95
Detail of 2 panels from the left screen of a pair, MET

Eisen, Snowy Landscape with a Shrine Beside a River, c. 1835
University of Wisconsin-Madison

One exception to painting—a woodblock print by Keisai Eisen, someone quite popular with 19th century European collectors—is included as an example of landscape prints intentionally made to appear as painted works. The woodblock was possibly carved based on a painting rather than a line drawing draft, conveying an 'impressionistic' effect, possessing what we might call a similar 'spirit of place' as that in Renoir's watercolor pieces, such as in his 'Landscape at Pont-Aven' (1892, Getty Museum, LA, shown below to the right), though different in tools, materials, and methods that went into the making of it.

Renoir, On the Shore of the Seine, c. 1879, Baltimore Museum of Art

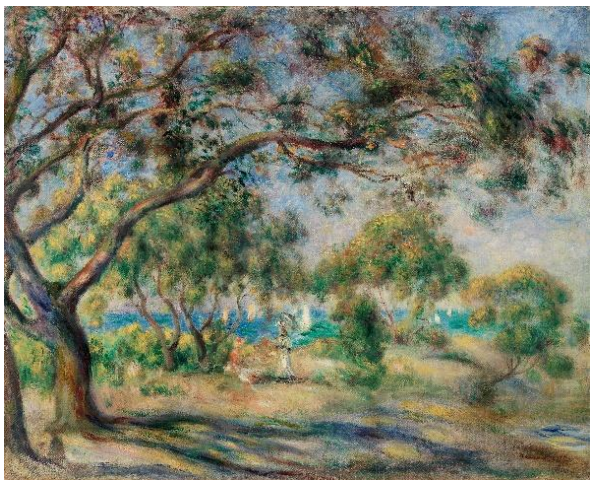
Renoir, Landscape at Pont-Aven, 1892, Getty Museum

Renoir's trees, especially in his dense treescapes painted in the late 1880s and early 1890s, such as 'Peninsula of Saint-Jean' (c. 1893, Barnes Foundation), or 'Bois de la Chaise', Noirmoutier (1892, Barnes Foundation), or other lesser known works of his done in southern or western France, now in private collections, with round, indistinct clusters of leaves looking almost like colored cotton balls, are evocative of bunjinga tree forms in terms of their contours, soft sensation of tactility, and overall distributed effect.

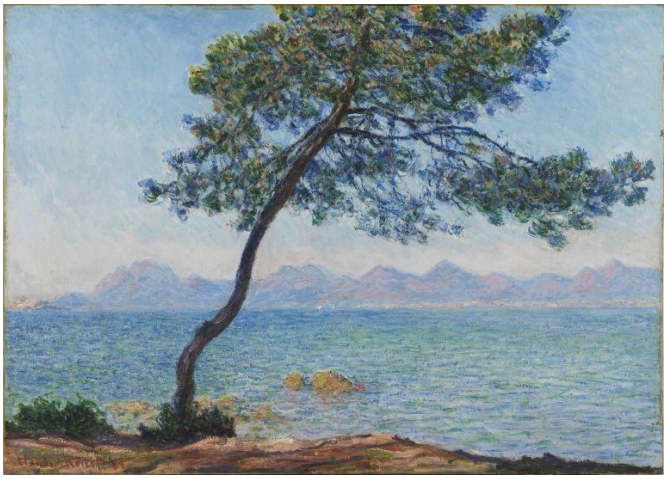
Among those works, his 'Bois de la Chaise' which follows, executed in the early fall of 1892 when visiting the isle of Noirmoutier west of Nantes, also shows the classic Japanese motif of the long, laterally outreaching branch—something that was particularly popular in the late Muromachi period (16th century) and onwards, as murals in castles and 'fusuma-e' (sliding door panel pictures) in temples. The Bois de la Chaise on the northern coast of the island, with vistas of the sea seen through the pines, is reminiscent of 'Yamato-e' (indigenous versus Chinese style) paintings of pines with sideways extending boughs on sandy beaches, a genre all of its own: 'hama-matsu-zu' (浜松図), literally 'beach-pine pictures', depicting coastal areas such as Matsushima, Ise, Settsu-Takasago, or Miho of Matsubara, to name a few. Even today, pine branches of astonishing length have been maintained with care, continuing to grow with supports placed under them, such as those of the seven centuries old 'Goyo-no-matsu' of Hosen-in Temple, Kyoto.

A painting by Monet, 'Antibes' (1888, Courtauld Collection), depicting what appears to be a pine, with a long laterally extending branch, is commonly understood in Western academic literature as an image reflecting Japanese compositional approaches found in woodblock prints, though deriving originally from Yamato-e painting.

"The composition of *Antibes*, with its silhouetted tree and open sides, reflects in general terms Monet's interest in Japanese prints, of which he was an avid collector. In the 1880s he travelled widely, exploring subjects which showed nature at its most lavish and extreme, and his knowledge of Japanese art helped him find ways of formulating these dramatic effects in pictorial terms." (*Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterpieces: The Courtauld Collection*, 1987, commentary for cat. 13)



Renoir, Bois de la Chaise, Noirmoutier, 1892, Barnes Foundation



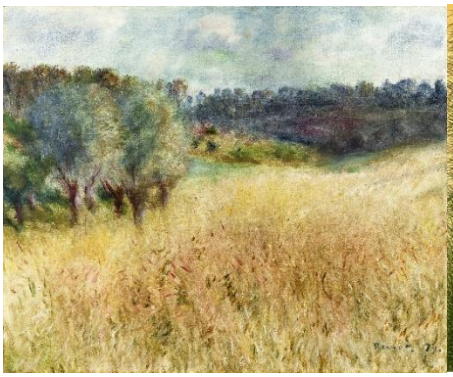
Monet, Antibes, 1888 © The Courtauld Institute of Art

Though more densely populated with trees in the midground, 'Bois de la Chaise' nevertheless shares in its conception something of Monet and Japanese approaches to coastal imagery. It echoes a combination of Japanese motifs and techniques, suggestive of Yamato-e and bunjinga (literati painting), and the bright green and blue ocean hues may also be in part an inspiration of Hokusai-type chromatics (and in Monet, though less pronounced here than on other canvases of his). At the very least, Renoir, aware of Monet's interest and use of Japanese approaches, and likely hearing of Monet's travels to Antibes in the southeast of France, or perhaps having seen his paintings done there, may have been stimulated to seek an analogous setting, while wishing to avoid obvious imitation by going, instead of south, to the west coast of France with similar pictorial opportunities. The same might be said of Alfred Sisley, that subtle influence extending like a slow rippling effect further afield. While traveling to Cardiff with the financial support of his patron to formalize his marriage, the choice of a place on the Welsh coast may have had to do with his seriously failing health and an ever more keenly felt artistic yearning to try his hand at the sort of progressive seascapes his old comrades had achieved, resulting in works such as 'A Cardiff Shipping Lane' (1897, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims, see Appendix).

The correspondence with the bunjinga style in Renoir's canvases extends at times to the representation of foliage detail, such as the myriad identical leaves of his 'In Brittany' (1886, Barnes Foundation). As is typical of literati technique, masses of tiny, individually outlined rice grain-like shapes fill in large areas of a picture surface like a flat pattern, which are contrasted with other meticulously delineated, differing types of small brushwork for plant forms, as well as less distinct, diffused color, which in the case of literati painting, extends as a fading ink-wash. A similar method as 'In Brittany' can be found in Goshun's 'Orchid Pavilion Gathering' in the lower right part of that picture, where five figures are sitting under the shade of a tree done in that manner.

Along the same lines of the massing and close packing of vegetation as 'In Brittany', but by completely different forms, is Renoir's 'Bulrushes on the Banks of the Seine' (1874, private collection), characterized by tall dense formations of bulrushes. This recalls the Japanese tradition of portraying tall dense growths of a variety of plants as a primary and dominating motif of a picture. This includes depictions, as in Renoir, of bulrushes, 'gama' (蒲); then there are depictions of 'igusa' (藺草) the rush used to make tatami mats; also reeds called 'ashi' (葦 or 芦) are often portrayed; a Japanese motif well known in the West is the 'kakitsubata' (燕子花), the Japanese water iris; of course bamboo goes without saying; another is 'ogi' (荻) Amur silvergrass; or Japanese silvergrass called 'susuki' (芒 or 薄)—a popular autumn motif.

Of this last example of susuki grass, there is a pair of six-panel screens, originally attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu but more likely by Tosa Mitsuoki, 'Autumn Grasses and Partridges' (or Quails, 秋草鶉図屏風, 17th century, Nagoya City Museum) that first comes to mind, and is shown on the following page, though there are countless variations of this imagery, such as another by the Tosa School, 'Quail amid Autumn Grasses and Flowers' (c. 1590-1600, LACMA); or Suzuki Kiitsu's 'Autumn Grass' (19th cent., before 1858, Freer Gallery, Smithsonian), to name but a few examples. The motif of tall, relatively uniform vegetation dominating the picture space is a favorite subject of Japanese artists including Hokusai, and appears in craft designs such as those of textiles. Compositions of Renoir related to this idea that could be raised include 'The Seine at Champrosay' (1876, Musée d'Orsay), 'Field of Banana Trees Near Algiers' (1881, Musée d'Orsay), and 'Wheatfield' (1879, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza), which follows.



Renoir, Wheatfield, 1879
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza © Carmen Thyssen Collection

Tosa Mitsunobu (attrib.), Autumn Grasses and Partridges Byobu, early Edo period/17th century
Nagoya City Art Museum, image Wikimedia Commons

We have limited our discussion here to Edo period artists because in terms of quantity fewer earlier examples would have reached Europe in Renoir's time. But in terms of perceptual and aesthetic affinities, we would be remiss not to mention the 'haboku' or splashed-ink style (characteristic of Zen painting, 'zenga'; 'ga' meaning painting), such as those by the renowned Sesshu (1420-1506), who combined the Song landscape tradition of China with his own distinctive vision three hundred years before Taiga, Buson, and Goshun. Haboku painting in Japan, stimulated by artists witnessing the Southern Song master Yujian's 'Mountain Village in the Clearing Mist' (13th century, Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo), brought over by Zen monks in the late 14th or early 15th century, came to be esteemed perhaps more so than in China of the same era, where masterpieces of greater monumentality and complexity were vaunted.

Sesshu's 'Haboku Landscape' mounted on a hanging scroll (破墨山水図, c. 1495, Tokyo National Museum), which displays a brushwork of scattered, individually recognizable strokes of varying pressure with brush hairs ending unevenly in an intentionally visible state, carrying the spirit of calligraphy into painting, set a cherished precedent for centuries. Another haboku work by a Sesshu disciple, the brilliant Toshun (等春, flourished early 16th century), stands out as particularly illuminating of Impressionist conceptions. Titled 'Koten bosetsu' (江天暮雪, late 15th or early 16th century, Masaki Art Museum, Osaka), translated as 'Evening Snow on the River and Sky', depicting the depths of winter, where mountain, river, snow, and sky are unified in movement, its monochrome gradations of light and dark ink-wash capture light, energy, and atmospheric sensations with only the most essential of unwavering strokes. The idea of 'ki' (気) is marvelously expressed, combining the eternal, ephemeral, and transcendent into one. Instead of the characteristic Southern Song "inwardness and quiescence" of Yujian, Toshun is closer to Sesshu, and is "no scene of poetic wandering; mass and motion rule." (Stanley-Baker 1984: 134) We might guess if it were to have been shown next to Monet's 'Impression, Sunrise' at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, it would have garnered the harshest criticisms from Louis Leroy (the critic who unwittingly coined the term 'Impressionism'), as a landscape less finished than "wallpaper in its embryonic state"—for there *is* something embryonic or primaeval about Toshun's masterpiece. Indeed, the idea of intentional 'lack of finish' yet 'complete'—as put forth by Baudelaire, and which was to become a touted innovation of Impressionism, differentiating it from past Western traditions, is a fundamental 'sumi-e' (ink-wash) quality, especially the haboku style.

That Renoir observed Japanese painting can be confirmed through his own works—in the backdrop of 'Madame Charpentier and her Children' (see Virginie Meyer's earlier referenced article on Georges Charpentier at agorha.inha.fr regarding the family's collection of kakemono) and by the fact that such hand-painted Japanese artworks are found in numerous pictures by other Impressionist and Realist portraitists. Often it is women who are depicted in rooms decorated with a bewildering variety of Japanese objets d'art as in Georges Croegaert's 'La Liseuse' (1888, Roy Miles Gallery, London) or Alfred Stevens' 'Femme à la poupée' (1894, private collection). These often included 'okimono' ('things placed' as byobu), 'kakemono' ('things hung' as kakejiku) and 'makimono' ('things rolled' as emaki)—as in James Tissot's 'The Japanese Scroll' (1872-73, private collection). Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's portrait of the photographer 'M. Paul Sescau' (1891, Brooklyn Museum) done in the artist's studio, indicates the continuing interest and existence of kakemono paintings in the ateliers of artists in the 1890s. It also reveals the application of the elongated format to the painting itself, Lautrec having executed 'a kakemono in a kakemono style' or what is sometimes referred to as 'mise en abyme', along the lines of a mirror in a mirror, etc.

The number of Japanese artifacts appearing in European paintings, photographs of salons and japonaiserie-style rooms of the time is beyond count; and yet they must have been no more than a minuscule fraction of what existed in Parisian middle and upper class homes, among which Renoir counted his patrons, such as Henri Cernuschi. The Cernuschi Museum in Paris has a grand collection of Japanese paintings and prints of all kinds bequeathed by their former owner—just to give one possible source for Renoir hardly considered. As the museum states online, "The collection, brought back from Asia by Henri Cernuschi at a time when the Impressionists had a passion for Japanese prints, made the mansion on Avenue Vélasquez a centre of Japonisme from 1876 to 1896." (www.cernuschi.paris.fr) Visitors there must have had a chance to

observe paintings as well, whether color Yamato-e, literati suibokuga, or monochrome zenga. As an indication of broad interest in Europe towards Japanese painting, if we take the case of England, in 1881 over two thousand Japanese and Chinese paintings of William Anderson's were acquired by the British Museum, which included many haboku and other suiboku works he had collected over the years (e.g., museum no. 1881,1210,0.2855; no. 1881,1210,0.1610.1-76).

For Renoir's works from the mid-1880s onward, other readily accessible sources were publications on Japan, discussed by the former chair of the Society for the Study of Japonisme, Miyazaki Katsumi, in his 'Suiboku Japonisme Overview—Concerning [Qualities] of Brush-line and Sumi-Black[ness]' (水墨のジャポニスム・外観：筆の線、墨の黒をめぐって), one article from the 2013 Hatakeyama Symposium held in Tokyo on 'Suiboku Japonisme' (*Japonisme Studies 33*, 2014: 19-31). In Germany, chromolithographs of Japanese paintings were being published by Wilhelm Greve of Berlin from the mid-1880s, and within Renoir's reach were certainly copies of Judith Gautier's previously remarked upon *Poëmes de la libellule* (1885), illustrated with brushwork by Yamamoto Hosui, who resided in Paris for almost a decade, starting with the 1878 Paris Exposition.

Hosui, known as 'Yamamoto' in Paris, "created no small sensation among lovers of Japanese art in Paris" through the publication of Gautier's book, undertaken by the leading company in multicolor printing at the time, under the direction of Gillot, an enthusiastic admirer of Japanese art, ensuring high-quality reproduction of Hosui's illustrations. Among the various artworks Hosui produced during his stay was a Japanese style mural in Judith Gautier's villa in 1883, but of greater significance was his 1885 solo exhibition in Paris. As Professor Takashina Erika at Kyoto University notes:

> "Renoir's younger brother, Edmond, who regularly wrote articles for *La Vie Moderne* and would later become the magazine's executive editor, had authored a review on Hosui's one-man exhibition, so it is possible that Hosui and Renoir met each other at the Charpentier salon. At the very least, Renoir, through his brother, must have known of a Japanese painter by the name of Yamamoto." ('East-West Cultural Exchange in Art–France and the Orient in the 1880s', Part 2, July/August, 2003: 60)

Edmond, in his article on Hosui's solo exhibition in *Le XIXe siècle*, one of Paris' foremost daily newspapers ('Yamamoto, Peintre japonais', May 12, 1885), observed that of his three hundred exhibited works, many were attached with a purchased tag demonstrating the popularity of his works. This was despite the illness and death of Victor Hugo at the time, and the closing of the exhibition for three days in mourning. Held on the second floor of 2 rue Caumartin, running from May 9 to June 9, 1885, Takashina documents that "successive reviews appeared in the newspapers and magazines in the weeks following its opening" which "suggests that there was remarkable interest in this Japanese artist." (Part 2, 2003: 59)

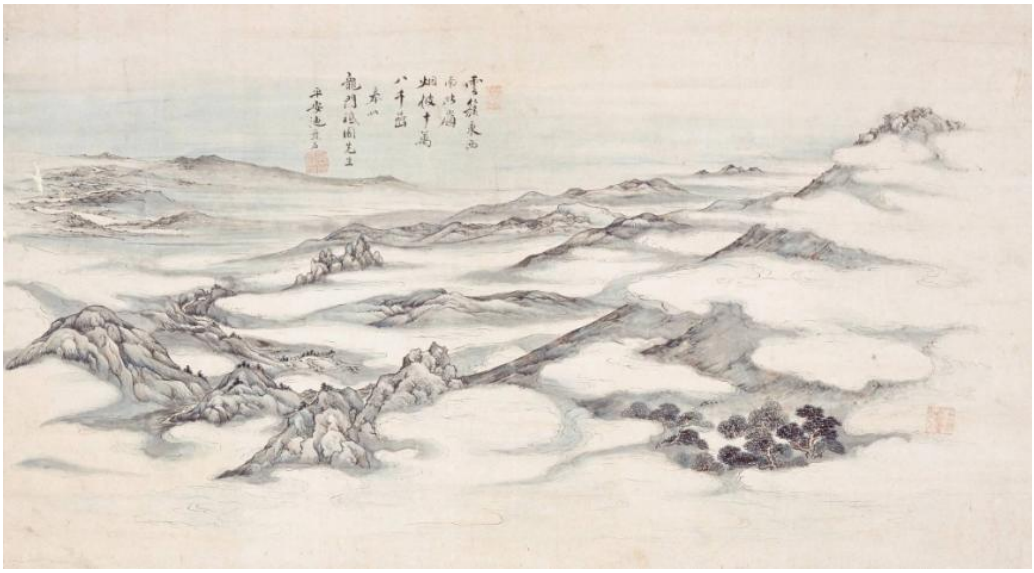
Hosui was, according to Takashina, alluded to in Paris as "Frenchman of the Far East", or "Parisian from Tokyo" (Ibid.). He was not, in other words, considered merely a Tokyoite in Paris—indicating how much he had assimilated into and been welcomed by Parisian society. Frankly, it seems almost impossible that Renoir did not have a good idea of him. Hosui and another painter who gained renown in Europe, Watanabe Seitei, were both listed as contributors to the journal *La Vie Moderne* (Part 2, 2003: 60) created by Georges Charpentier—the husband, of course, of Madame Charpentier, and father of the girls in the painting discussed earlier. But more importantly, it was none other than Auguste Renoir who did two of the journal's cover designs, so we may infer he was familiar with the goings on of the publication through Charpentier and his own brother.

Renoir was thus likely to have been aware of Watanabe Seitei as well, who, for instance, was acquainted with the Goncourts and actually gifted a 'done on-the-spot' painting—a 'sekiga'—to Degas during one of their meetings at the Goncourt residence (the sekiga is now at the Clark Art Institute). For Degas, that interest may have been there from early on; as just one example, his 'Woman at the Window' (1871-72, The Courtauld Collection), despite its unfinished state, shows from infrared photography that he thinned his paint so that it could be used like a watercolor in thin washes (*Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterpieces*, 1987, cat 7). His fluent line drawing may aptly be described as 'kotsugaki' (骨描き, literally 'skeletal drawing'), done on a brownish paper reminiscent of the tones of a kakemono, and its combination of dark, solid lines, diffused color, and strokes where pressure and release are left clearly visible also remind one of the same. It may have been closer to completion than is generally believed, considering its markedly thick-filled patches contrasting with contiguous parts of the same subject or object hardly touched at all, as well as in certain places creating clear transitional treatments between the two, much in the spirit of Sino-Japanese ink-wash painting.

In any case it is hard to imagine that visiting artists from Japan, the font of the Japonisme vogue, and a true novelty for Parisians, would not become a lively topic of conversation at the Café Guerbois and elsewhere. Watanabe Seitei, who had also come to Paris for the 1878 exposition as Hosui did, stayed three years in Europe, mostly in Paris, making a name for himself and winning a bronze medal there, then another at the 1883 Amsterdam International Colonial and Export Exhibition. In short, in one form or another, Renoir had multiple means of hearing of and observing Japanese painting, either in publications or firsthand.

Earlier we saw similarities with suibokuga and Renoir's more subdued works indicating possible avenues of research; we meet them here again, and the wide range of affinities between Renoir's experiments and transformations, as well as those of his Impressionist colleagues, viewed from the perspective of Far Eastern painting techniques, open up a relatively unexplored angle of comparative appreciation for Western scholarship—unduly constrained to woodblock prints until now—to be freely pursued.

To wind up these musings on Japanese and Impressionist painting, let us shift our focus from concerns with floral shapes to broader horizons—panoramic landscapes, a genre we will investigate in greater depth later. A painting by Ike no Taiga, 'True View of Mount Asama' (mid-18th century, Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo), is followed by Renoir's 'Marine' (or 'Blick aufs Meer', 1879/1880, Kunsthaus Zürich). We introduce them here because they impress upon us the need for comparative analysis of East-West painting to painting, especially of pre-Meiji Japanese traditions to Western examples. A careful examination of the two leads to an unmistakable impression that a link of some kind between them exists; one might postulate an indirect transmission of the image through a highly similar emulative work, or a facsimile of Taiga's original. This would make sense as 'Marine' is unusual for Renoir, hinting at the use of a novel source of inspiration. Taiga's composition is of a genre called 'shinkei' (真景), or 'true view', where the artist at times must visualize a scene from a position he cannot physically see from, and Renoir's also has a somewhat dreamy aspect of the imagined.



Taiga, True View of Mount Asama, mid-18th century, Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo

Renoir, Marine (Blick aufs Meer), 1879/1880, Kunsthaus Zürich, image Wikimedia Commons

Faunal Japonisme

Reserving further discussion of landscapes for later, let us now take a look at what we might call Renoir's 'faunal japonisme' as opposed to his 'floral japonisme'. We spoke of Cernuschi's dog 'Tama' earlier, but only spoke of the background. Here we examine an earlier work, shown below, that indicates from the 1860s, as in his 'Lily and Greenhouse Plants' of 1864, long before his Impressionist transformation in his Realist era, he may have used Japanese woodblock prints as a source for basic ideas, not only for subject matter and pictorial layout, but also in conveying the psychological character of his portraiture. We shall delve into this comparison in some depth, as it is an illuminating clue to Renoir's japonisme.

Renoir, The Boy with the Cat, 1868 © Musée d'Orsay
Patrice Schmidt, photographer

Kunimasa, Woman, Cat, and Kotatsu, 1796, MFA Boston

Renoir's 'Boy with the Cat' (1868, Musée d'Orsay) above to the left, when placed next to Utagawa Kunimasa's print, 'Woman, Cat, and Kotatsu' (1796, MFA Boston), despite the nudity of the boy and its homoerotic undertones (surprising for Renoir), it otherwise is plain to see that the two compositions are twins of a kind.

In the Kunimasa print, a woman looks tenderly at a cat, or given its diminutive size, what appears to be a kitten, with the red collar around its neck, typical for pet cats in Japan. It may be considered an early portrayal of what is known commonly as 'kawaii', the now globally recognized Japanese sense of cuteness. It is a fine expression of the *human* sentiment towards that quality, communicated through the woman's body language and expression, as seen from the perspective of what we will henceforth assume is a kitten. The cuteness of the kitty cannot really be ascertained directly; it is primarily conveyed indirectly via the woman from whose expression we imagine it. But the quality of kawaii is, after all, a human emotion projected onto something, whether living or inanimate, and so the portrayal is actually more psychologically perceptive on the part of the artist.

We do though, from the hunched pose of the 'Lilliputian' kitten, sense it to be somewhat bewildered by the Gulliver-sized face looking down at it. We perceive therefore, despite the limited view of only its back, something of the 'persona' of the kitten, just as in bijinga portraits displaying only the back and nape of the neck of a woman (this oblique manner of conveying affective quality stimulated many European avant-garde artists to re-cast it in their individual ways). That is to say, Kunimasa is not only expressing the human sentiment of kawaii, but also the feline perspective of thus being viewed.

Human-feline empathy, if we may call it that, was most famously captured by Hiroshige in his 'Rice fields at Asakusa, shrine-visiting at Tori-no-machi' from his *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (1857), which depicts a solitary cat looking intently out of a window on a high floor with a vast panorama unfolding before him. We see mostly his back, but the ever so slight one-eighth or so view of his face gives us all we need to empathize with the cat's 'frame of mind'; in its isolation, we share the enjoyment and curiosity of the view and we become as close to the animal in psyche as art can do for us, a really marvelous picture in some ways for all its simplicity.

In Renoir's painting, the cat faces us; this is obviously different from Kunimasa. With its face pressed against the boy's, it is a more literal—a straightforward representation of the adorability of the pet, without the psychological detachment maintained towards it when regarding Kunimasa's print. Renoir's feline appeals directly to the viewer as in his 'Julie Manet' (1887, Orsay), where the effect reaches an almost saccharine level. Here too, the boy hugs and presses against it such that the pet seems 'smothered' in love, yet his feelings for it are convincing, so in that respect the compelling sense of bonding between pet and owner is synonymous in the ukiyo-e print and Renoir's painting. The boy's affection for the cat is somewhat imposed—but not entirely. In fact, it is not being unilaterally squeezed as in Julie Manet's portrait. The cat too 'embraces' the boy's forearm with his paw and tail affectionately curling about it, so that we sense a strong *mutual* affection.

Both pictures, therefore, are fundamentally analogous in their conveyance of an empathetic intimacy and an expression of animal individuality beyond that of traditional European portraiture with pets, where they were commonly depicted on the floor, as in Madame Charpentier's dog in the picture examined earlier, or held on the lap, perhaps cuddled at breast level, and only rarely close to the face. The effect of Japanese print images was to nudge the animal closer to the level of the human with greater 'cheek to whisker' contact, a closing of the psychic distance between them—a step towards greater consciousness of the individuality of such creatures in contrast to mechanistic notions of animal behavior in a preceding age whose views were tinted with Cartesianism. From India to Japan, animals had been always regarded as possessed of a soulful nature ('Issun no mushi nimo gobu no tamashi'—'Even the one inch insect has a 1/2 inch soul')—exemplified by the poet Issa, who constantly sang in his poetry of insects and what would be considered 'critters' in the West. The varied depiction of cats, a long-time favorite of Japanese ukiyo-e artists such as Harunobu, Utamaro, Hiroshige, and particularly Kuniyoshi, is well-known. Even in cases of anthropomorphism, Japanese portrayals are more lithe and natural—if one can be allowed to say such a thing about anthropomorphisms—fusing the feline and human more artfully than in early illustrated versions of *Puss in Boots,* for instance, where the head and hands have been switched with those of a cat in otherwise stiffly humanoid figures.

Despite the fundamental parallels, the posed nature of Renoir's composition is hard to ignore; a naked boy hunched over with his legs crossed and body bent in a peculiar fashion—unusual and tiring for the sitter to maintain wherever it was painted. It was likely contrived to add an original element of grace, rather than just a straight standing pose viewed from behind, but does not completely succeed. The Kunimasa pose is more natural and relaxed, and it is the kitten which is tense with its noticeably hunched back. One possible explanation might be an intentional inversion here of positions, to avoid direct borrowing, something we will see again—in this case the back of Kunimasa's cat facing us versus the human frontal view, which is inverted in Renoir.

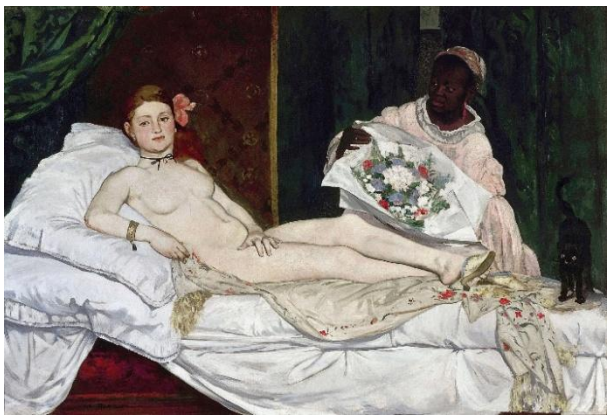
Renoir's adaptation of the picture concept to a Western setting, however, creates a sense of slight incongruousness. The two pictures also reflect practical cultural differences. In Japan, sitting on tatami floors with low lying futon covered heaters (kotatsu) was common, and here, the woman wears several layers of clothing, comfortably enjoying the company of her small friend. Renoir's luxuriant drape, covering what may be a table or piano, and its thick green velvety top, are suggestive of a cold season, and the darkness beyond is also evocative of the coolness and stillness of an evening. It is not a comforting setting for an unclad figure. In any case, the heavy, oversized drapery's placement comes across as somewhat unnatural—if not a piano cover, is it a borrowing of the kotatsu idea, another aspect of the japonisme of domestic interiors, as seen in architect and designer Édouard Lièvre and cabinet-maker Gabriel Viardot's elegant japonisant furnishings in France, or architect Edward Godwin's 'Anglo-Japanese' style appointments in Britain?

It would be easier to understand its presence with its scattered floral pattern, and the void of darkness beyond as constructed to create an analogous visual effect to that of Kunimasa's layout, albeit transformed into a cool palette of blues and greens on black instead of the original's warm purples and greens on yellow. And in the boy's hunched over aspect, in the curve of the hairline with its textured fringe, the eyebrows and sideburns, the slightly parted lips, which otherwise might be coincidence, here seems to suggest an even finer mimesis at the level of detail than most would realize at first glance.

Depicting cats was strongly associated with Japan at the time, particularly for Manet, and later for Théophile Steinlen. Jacques Dufwa explains in *Winds From the East: A Study in the Art of Manet, Degas, Monet, and Whistler 1856-86* (Stockholm Studies in the History of Art 34, 1981) that Manet's

> "*Le Rendez-vous des chats* (1868) and *Le Chat et les fleurs* (1869) were designed with the same purpose: to illustrate a book that referred to Japanese art. These prints reflect two different aspects of Japanese conception in an extraordinary way: one, predominantly formal, is summary: the other, emphasizing content, is faithful to detail, intimate." (1981: 82)

It was when Manet was doing his cat drawings that Renoir's painting was also created. It was something in the air at the time, this 'feline japonisme', and has not been sufficiently pursued in Manet's 'Olympia' (1863, Musée d'Orsay), whose black cat may have had an analogous, but more esoteric symbolic function than Japanese fans and vases, alluding to a similar Japanese source only he himself, and artists like him, understood.



Manet, Olympia, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, image Google Arts & Culture

Shunsho, Haikai Book of the Cuckoo, 1788 © The Trustees of the British Museum

Titian's 'Venus of Urbino' (1538, Uffizi, Florence) is the obvious, ostensible source for Olympia, where Manet's cat takes the place of Titian's curled dog. But what a difference in the character of the lap dog is Manet's cat with its arched back, so much more like that of Katsukawa Shunsho's ninth print in his *Haikai Book of the Cuckoo* (1788) shown above, and closer to it in message and meaning.

And, we could point out, though often bypassed in commentaries, "Olympia's face is framed, mostly, by the brown of a Japanese screen" as T. J. Clark observes in his *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984: 136). Thus references to Japan are possibly at head and toe, which expand the allusions beyond the usual racial and social connotations often raised, and which brings us back to Renoir, that in some of his paintings, such as in the nursing scene of 'Aline and her son Pierre' (1886) that we saw earlier, there is a solitary cat in the corner (a motif that disappears in his other versions of the painting), a motif also in Utamaro pictures of women and children, such as 'Warau kado niwa fukukitaru' (笑う門には福来る), in English sometimes called 'Woman and Child Playing with a Cat' (c. 1803, e.g., former Freddie Mercury collection), from the series *Kodakara tatoe no fushi* (子宝喩の節). As for the flowers brought to Olympia, especially the large central white flower, upon examining it anatomically, by the spiky, irregular look of the petals, it appears closer to a Japanese spider chrysanthemum than any strain of dahlia (remember this was before chrysanthemums in France came to be associated with funerals and mourning). And some of the smaller surrounding flowers might possibly be Japanese anemones (see e.g., the Fantin-Latour 'Japanese Anemones')—if so, the entire bouquet was intended to be a Japanese arrangement—in line with the fashionable japonisme vogue.

We should mention that besides the cat, screen, and possibly flowers in Manet's Olympia, it was once common to see in its general characteristics an influence of Japan. Nils Gösta Sandblad, in his classic *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception* (1954), after speaking of Manet's 'La Chanteuse des rues', known as 'Street Singer' in English (c. 1862, MFA Boston), wrote:

> "The number of scholars who, in their researches [in relation to Japanese influence on Manet] have returned to *Olympia* is rather more numerous. First among these is [Henri] Focillon, who approaches the question in his brilliant study *L'Estampe japonaise et la peinture en Occident*, where he remarks: 'Rapprochement 51ignificative d'ailleurs, si l'on songe que l'*Olympia*, où les noirs ont déjà, comme dans l'art japonais, une valeur tonale, est modelée par grands plans simples et se présente, avec tous ses éminents mérites de peinture, comme une œuvre graphique autant que plastique au sens propre des termes.' François Mathey follows him, in his little book on *Olympia*: 'En cela il suivit les leçons des japonais et peut-être à Hokusai qu'il admirait doit-il ce goût précieux de la calligraphie expressive.' " (1954: 79, annotations bracketed)

Later Sandblad reiterates "Olympia is one of the earliest works in which art-critics in general have perceived the significance of the Japanese woodcut for Manet" (1954: 99)—but then again, this book was written in 1954, Focillon's essay in 1921, and Mathey's book in 1947 (later chief curator at the Musée des Arts décoratifs for three decades), and not 2026; in the coming decades the idea may be completely lost if mainstream scholarship continues on its present course, confident that the public will continue to believe every newer generation knows better about something that fades further into the past.

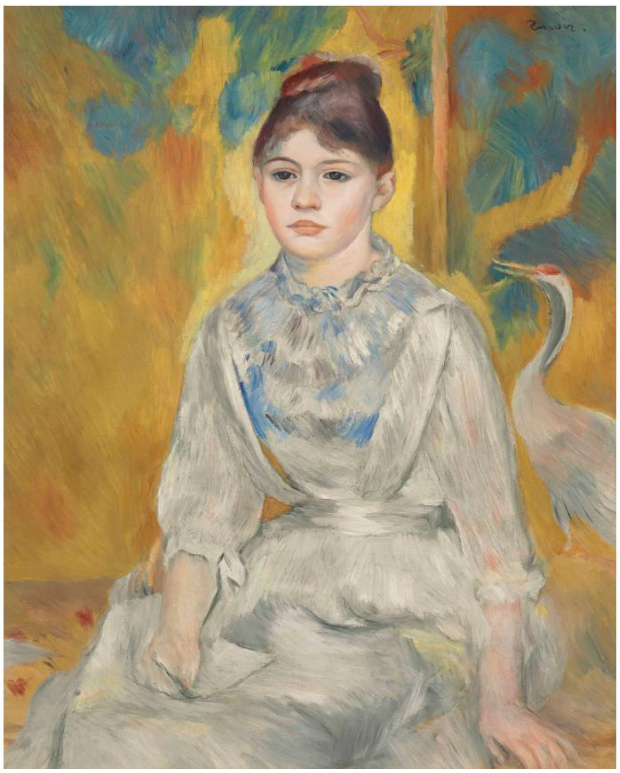
Renoir, Aline Nursing/Aline and her son Pierre, 1886
Private collection, Wikimedia Commons

Tamagawa Shucho, Chichi nomi, c. early 19th century
Tokyo National Museum

We conclude the topic of 'feline japonisme' with a juxtaposition of Renoir's 'Aline Nursing/Aline and her son Pierre' (1886, private collection), already discussed, and a print by Tamagawa Shucho (active c. 1789-1804), 'Chichi nomi' meaning 'breast feeding' of the series *Furyu kesho kagami* (c. early 19th century, e.g. Tokyo National Museum). Shucho was a contemporary and traditionally thought to be an associate of Utamaro's, and his themes and style seem to take after the latter. This print was published by Ezakiya Kichibei, and known to have been produced in good quantity (see Goto Shigeki, ed., *Ukiyo-e taikei, Vol. 6: Utamaro / Eishi*, 1975: 121). Note in Shucho's image, in the left hand corner, the pet animal staring off beyond the edge of the composition. It is actually a toy dog, but looks much like a cat with its pointy ears and short muzzle and long whiskers, and may easily be interpreted as such, if not informed otherwise.

From the feline we now look at an avian motif. What follows is Renoir's 'Young Girl with a Swan' (1886, private collection, image Bridgeman, original Christie's). Despite what is clearly not a swan—being different in color, beak, wings, and legs—indeed in almost every conceivable anatomical sense, the title persists (e.g., Gilles Néret, 2026). Nor is it a heron, though closer in appearance, which at least Christie's included as an alternative title ('La jeune fille au héron') in its auction of the piece in 2014. But herons belong not only to a different taxonomic family, but even a separate order (Pelecaniformes). The truth of the matter is that the bird is of the Gruiformes order; it is a crane, or 'tsuru' (鶴); more specifically, when referring to the Japanese red-crowned crane as in Renoir's work above—it is called a 'tanchozuru' (丹頂鶴) whose scientific appellation is 'Grus japonensis'.

Not only that, the likely source of the avian image is a Japanese byobu (folding screen). The two panels from a six-panel screen to the right of Renoir's portrait, by the renowned Kano School of painting, at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA), are just one example of a 'shokakuzu' (松鶴図), meaning 'pine and crane picture'—one of the most common decorative motifs of Japan. It appears in ukiyo-e prints, surimono ('greeting cards', described earlier in relation to Madame Hartmann), 'kakejiku' (hanging scroll) paintings, 'senmenga' (fan paintings), porcelains, bronzes—in short, it is omnipresent in Japanese art. The above detail to the right of 'Cranes with Pine' (18th to mid-19th century, one of a pair of such screens, together titled 'Cranes with Pine and Bamboo') is typical in its overhanging green pine boughs contrasting with a gold-leaf backdrop, which is suggested in Renoir's indistinctly shaped but somewhat correspondingly distributed hues.



Renoir, Young Girl with a Swan, 1886, private collection

Kano School, Detail of Cranes with Pine, Edo period, MIA

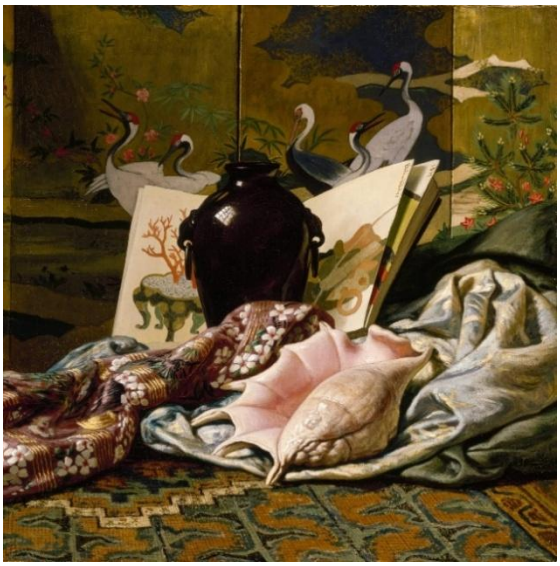
If so, Renoir was following clear precedents in Western portraiture depicting tanchozuru—for, some years earlier, Alfred Stevens had produced such a picture, 'Young Woman with a Japanese Screen' (1880, Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY), which Renoir's image echoes in various ways, shown on the following page. The fine realist painting of Elihu Vedder 'Japanese Still Life' (1879, Los Angeles County Museum of Art) is another example shown next to Stevens, a meticulous transcription of a byobu depicting tanchozuru—though once again, rather than as a crane, it is catalogued as "a golden heron screen" on the museum's website. Manet a few years before had situated in the background of his 'Nana' (1877, Hamburger Kunsthalle) what also appears to be a Japanese crane or an image derived from one. The bird appears much more clearly in his 'La Dame aux éventails' (1873, Musée d'Orsay), in the middle of the picture in the background on a byobu that has been flattened and mounted on the wall, and it is almost as if Nina de Callias (the sitter) is positioned so that she doesn't obstruct the view of it. Even earlier we find a gold-leaf screen with the same avian motif in the 'Portrait of a Woman in a Green Dress' (c. 1870, private collection) by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Emma Sandys, the younger sister of the artist Frederick Sandys. By the time Renoir conceived his picture, he was following what one might say had nearly become an established 'genre' among artists in the West.

Furthermore, in Renoir's painting, there is a vertical line in the backdrop, to the right of the Girl's head, which reinforces the idea that the subject may have posed before a folding screen, since such an interruption would occur at around that point between panels of the screen, as can be seen in the byobu panels juxtaposed to it. And given the width of the vertical break, i.e., the thickness of the column, we can also infer that it is the 'breaking' fold of the screen, projecting towards the Girl and viewer at the column, since it would appear only as a thin seam were it to be folding away from us, that is receding from us, or if flattened as in the Kano School example. This also mirrors the piece by Alfred Stevens, though the angling of the panels is reversed.

In Renoir's work the overall tonal sense and draftsmanship is reminiscent of his 'Aline and her son Pierre' (1886), possessing the "clarity of the Japanese" as was described earlier. As in the case with many of the paintings we have discussed, the Japanese elements also often serve as the nucleus of the chromatic scheme for the entire work. The crane, primarily white with touches of darker hues crowning it, accenting its eyes and neck, is as if simulated in the girl with her darkly highlighted eyes, and by her blouse under her white, silken dress which is traversed—though horizontally, rather than vertically—with touches of black and blue across her neck and chest. She carries herself with the grace of a tsuru, and the winged creature likewise shares her ethereal quality.

Interestingly, while the Japanese crane is usually depicted in flocks or groups of two or three, we see only one in Renoir's picture. The species is known to form a life-long relationship with a mate, and thus became a symbol of faithfulness and purity. Here might we propose it is the girl in a sense, who takes that place, and she is cast—unlike the sensuous, earthy women common to Renoir's oeuvre—as an emblem of refinement and innocence. It seems unlikely that Renoir had heard of the Japanese folk tale of a plaintive crane who transformed herself into a beautiful young woman dressed in white, plucking her own feathers when alone to weave heavenly fabrics on a loom for an old couple (or man) who rescued her when she was in avian form; but the portrait might well serve as an illustration for a similar tale, for there is a touch of pathos in the girl's expression. In any case, in Renoir the tanchozuru is more than merely a decorative element, more than simply a chromatic key to the painting: it appears to have suggested the affective and psychological character of the entire picture. We might add that often the setting of the crane motif, at times on screens, but especially in kakemono or woodblock prints, is dawn or dusk, and comes with spreading reddish hues, or with similarly colored flowers as in the example next to Renoir's painting, and in the examples below.

Stevens, Young Woman with a Japanese Screen, 1880
Speed Art Museum, image Wikimedia Commons



Vedder, Detail (right half) of Japanese Still Life, 1879
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

By the mid-1880s, byobu depicting cranes or other Japanese motifs had been exhibited repeatedly and illustrated in a plethora of books and journals—not to mention those Renoir would have encountered in the homes of his patrons—becoming a true staple of the interior décor of the well to do. We can assume Renoir must have been aware of its appeal as an art form and especially as a backdrop for portraiture, for it seems he himself owned one and used it that way. In Albert André's 'Renoir Painting his Family in his Studio at 73 rue de Caulaincourt, Paris' (1901, Musée Renoir, Cagnes-sur-Mer), a byobu-style screen acts as a background element for his own family portrait. The folding panels, though rendered indistinctly, display a design of large medallions distributed sparsely and asymmetrically, where one out of three or so are conspicuously truncated. The dark outline suggests a black lacquered rim, except for a lighter color at the corners which corresponds in scale to byobu corner fittings, and the inter-panel vertical rims seem to be wrapped over with the same material as the main surface of the panel itself, rather than panels individually framed, all in-line with traditional Japanese manufacture.

In fact, there is a photograph 'Mme. Renoir, Coco, and Pierre' (c. 1901-02, in White, 1984: 223) of what may be this screen, similar in pattern distribution, and though only a small part of it is visible, the image is sharp and it looks quite clearly of Japanese make. The 'kamon' (Japanese family crest) which decorates it can also be seen in 'Aline, Coco, and Pierre, Le Cannet' (c. 1902, photographer unknown, in White, 2017, Chapter 5), looming right above Coco's head. It then becomes apparent that it is a crest called 'kawari itsutsu omodaka' (変わり五つ沢瀉), repeated probably across all the panels. Another photo with the same screen, mostly draped over with fabrics so only a portion of it is visible, is shown in the Appendix, along with this sort of design in a Utamaro triptych, as well as the aforementioned crest.

Women's Everyday Pursuits—Macro and Micro Correspondences with Ukiyo-e

Examples such as these, however, should not mislead the reader into concluding they have heard about the sum of it. Many more striking parallels exist—compositional, thematic, and in the specific treatment of forms—between Renoir's works and imagery from Japanese prints and picture books collected by his close associates such as Monet. Renoir himself, according to Rewald, owned some as well (Rewald, 1973: 207), though any details, and their whereabouts, like the Japanese objects he repeatedly painted in his studio or outdoors, are shrouded in obscurity. Were Monet alone Renoir's source, that would nevertheless constitute a substantial cache of images, even if Renoir only saw a portion of Monet's collection. At the latter's house in Giverny are numerous prints he collected over the years still covering the walls: 292 ukiyo-e sheets, some part of triptychs, with a few catalogue-numbered prints missing (see Kobayashi Toshinobu, 'Claude Monet's Ukiyo-e Print Collection', *Society for the Study of Japonisme Report No. 3*, 1983: 11-29).

Renoir, La Coiffure, 1888
Pola Museum, image Wikimedia Commons

Utamaro, Kiyomizu Temple (Shimizu), c. 1803
from *Fashionable Seven Komachi,* MFA

Moronobu, Leaf of illustrated book, late 17th century
from *One Hundred Japanese Women*, MET

We start with the simple act of grooming and hairdressing, a favorite subject of ukiyo-e artists from the days of Hishikawa Moronobu (1618–1694), just one example of an everyday routine that parallels subject matter in Renoir, such as his 'La Coiffure' (1888, Pola Museum of Art) shown above to the left. Degas, by the way, also follows the idea of Utamaro's 'Hairdresser' from the series *Twelve Types of Women's Handicraft* (1798-99, e.g., MFA), closely with his pastel 'Woman Having Her Hair Combed' (1886-88, MET). Utamaro's depiction of the strong pulling of the hair by the hairdresser—and thus also the skin of the face—is skillfully recreated in Degas' image.

What then comes to mind is Renoir's various depictions involving the female body and water—whether it be toiletry, bathing, drying after the bath, or otherwise relaxing by the shore. These are reminiscent of popular public bath or abalone diving scenes in Japanese prints. These are motifs which in Degas are widely recognized as a result of Japanese influence, but in the case of Renoir, even when there is a greater correspondence of detail, simply because it is Renoir, go overlooked. Yet the movement towards the here and now, in poses that reflected the relaxed, everyday postures of mundane settings in ukiyo-e prints—what might be described in Japanese as the quality of 'nanigenai' (何気ない)—was instrumental in the attainment of greater artistic and perceptual freedom, something shared by all the major Impressionist artists. Renoir was no different, even if his resulting figures would have a 17th century fleshiness and an 18th century chromatic quality about them. Nicole R. Myers, Senior Curator of European Art at the Dallas Museum of Art, observes that his 'Before the Bath' (c. 1875, Barnes Foundation), a mundane scene of feminine toiletry

> "...would be Renoir's first and only foray into the depiction of this everyday indoor ritual, and his composition, featuring a woman naked from the waist up, broke with standard conventions for the motif that involved little to no nudity. Renoir's utterly novel take on this traditional theme, transferred from the Mediterranean harem to the Parisian bedroom, may have been inspired by Japanese woodblock prints of the Edo period, such as those by Utagawa Kunisada that depict women, frequently stripped to the waist, bathing and performing their toilettes in boudoirs. Though the influence of Japanese prints on the development of Impressionism, particularly in the works of Monet and Mary Cassatt, has been studied in great depth, Renoir is typically excluded from this line of inquiry." ('From Realism to Impressionism: Renoir's Early Nudes', in Bell and Shackelford, eds., 2019: 81)

Again, the prevailing acceptance of Vollard's anecdotes at face value has effectively blocked its path. Going beyond 'Before the Bath', Myers suggests a much wider range of Renoir's nudes need to be studied in relation to Japanese prints, pointing to:

> "The similarities between his later outdoor bathers—chests exposed, draperies gathered at their hips, combing or fixing their hair against the backdrop of ocean or river—and those of Japanese ama divers (women who harvested pearls and shellfish) in the prints of Kunisada and Kitagawa Utamaro beg further investigation. Notably, the first owner of *Before the Bath*, Theodore Duret, was an early and important collector of Japanese art." (Bell and Shackelford, 2019: 81)

We might point to Monet's print of 'Abalone Divers' (ama) by Utagawa Kunisada, at his house in Giverny, for one. Originally a triptych, titled 'Mitsuuji Amuses Himself by the Sea', Part 3 (Mitsuuji isobe asobi sono san 光氏磯遊び 其三, 1859, image British Museum), of which Monet possessed the center sheet shown here below, and the left sheet also of abalone divers (not shown), but not the right side portraying Mitsuuji (*Beaux Arts Magazine*, February 2000). Next to it we have placed Renoir's etching, 'Two Bathers' from *L'Estampe originale* (1895, Metropolitan Museum of Art), in which the two women, though in different poses from the Kunisada figures, nevertheless reflect a comparable, inverted layout, almost, though not literally, as if the Kunisada image was viewed verso, held up to a light.

Kunisada, Abalone Divers, 1859, © The Trustees of the British Museum

Renoir, Two Bathers from *L'Estampe Originale*, 1895, MET

In Kunisada the female in the foreground is wringing her hair, while in Renoir's picture the girl is perhaps drying her foot, yet the two crouching figures with their bent knees and sprayed, angled feet seem to be counterparts, just as the two other figures sitting upright do; the other female abalone diver, placing her hands around her compressed knees, corresponds in Renoir's sketch to the girl with compressed knees placing her hands around her hat. The large waves of Kunisada in the immediate background also find their counterpart in Renoir's picture, though what they actually represent in the etching is not clear. Is it liquid or solid? Kunisada's waves, while we understand they must be surging water from the lines and color, the tactile impression they give is of a smooth, immobile solid, a quality possibly transmitted to Renoir, where they seem better understood as simply a shape derived from the undulations in Kunisada's image. In both cases those forms are contrasted with the flat surface of the sea extending infinitely beyond. More than any direct matching of draftsmanship, Renoir's two figures, in their relationship to each other and their surroundings, are analogous in emotive impact to Kunisada's figures and overall organization.

Given the long friendship between Monet and Renoir, it is not improbable that Renoir had the opportunity to come in contact with prints such as the one above. Prints of abalone fishers and clam gatherers were popular and a topic of study among collectors at the time:

> "The theme of awabi or shellfish divers is of great renown, appearing frequently in many collections. Monet himself possessed three such prints: two by Kunisada and one by Chikanobu. The sheet on the left [shown above] corresponds in part to the description Edmond de Goncourt provided of a similar work in his study of Utamaro."
>
> (Marie Rose Faure in *Beaux Arts Magazine,* Feb. 2000: 9)

Certainly, a variety of notable parallels with classic ukiyo-e imagery can be found in Renoir's conception of several other outdoor scenes, despite at times his pronounced use of shadow, sunlight, and reflection, which convey a very different first impression from that of woodblock prints. His 'Musselfishers at Berneval' (1879, Barnes Foundation), for instance, with its woman carrying a woven basket on her back, and looking over her shoulder at her children, recalls Japanese images of common folk women and children at the shore, such as in the 'shiohi-gari' or 'receded tide clam-gathering' genre, which a good number of artists from Hokusai to Chikanobu tried their hand at.

Take as another example, Renoir's color lithograph, 'Children Playing Ball' (or Playing with a Ball, 1900, Minneapolis Institute of Art). While ostensibly its subject is unrelated to the above motif occurring on mudflats or beaches, Hokusai's 'Shell Gathering' (shiohi-gari, first half of the 19th century, Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts) makes an intriguing comparison with Renoir's playful children.

Renoir, Children Playing Ball, color lithograph, 1900, MIA

Hokusai, Detail of Shell Gathering, 1800-1849, Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts

Such clam-gathering images were produced in abundant variations of the theme—men, women, and especially children in a race to find clams or mussels, running, searching and picking up, sometimes slipping and falling, while others carry baskets in hand or on their backs, all in a festive mood. By 1900, when Renoir's lithograph was made, woodblock prints by Hokusai, including his paintings, were widely published and collected, so the source, if Renoir had indeed seen such an image, could have been either an illustration in a Western publication, a painting observed firsthand of one of Hokusai's other shiohi-gari works, or that of a similar scene by one of his emulators.

It does seem slightly odd that Renoir's lithograph is supposedly portraying children playing ball, as there is more than one such object of different shape and size, and the item in question is rather small to be tossed about on open ground and nondescript for a toy. Would it be reasonable to say 'playing ball' is not a snug match with the image, and somewhat like the proverbial forced fit of a differently shaped peg, and that it is closer to a typical bivalve found at low tide, despite the change of setting to a grassy field? Nor does the pose of the two girls, who together gaze attentively at the object, strike one as of ball play as much as shared fascination for an interesting find.

A related ukiyo-e theme is that of the peculiar Japanese practice of pilgrimages en masse to Futamigaura beach, near the Ise Shrine, which offers an instructive comparison with Renoir's depictions of the bay of Moulin Huet at Guernsey. On the next page below Renoir's 'Rochers de Guernesey avec personnages' (1883, Musée des impressionnismes, Giverny) is Utamaro's triptych 'Women on the Beach at Futami-ga-ura' (1803/04, MFA Boston)—which, by the way, is also part of the Monet collection at Giverny, titled 'Jeunes filles sur la plage de Futamigaura' (fig. 45 in Aitken and Delafond, 1998: 60).

But before pursuing this particular comparison, we might keep in mind that while coastal scenes of commerce and menial work were common in Europe, Impressionist-type subject matter, and not just those of Renoir, of recreational beach outings, were *relatively* scarce before the mid-19th century, compared to these ukiyo-e genres with their plentiful depictions of what may be plainly stated as 'having fun' at the beach (Eugène Boudin's beach scenes that are raised in relation to Monet date from the 1860s when ukiyo-e were already seeping into France). While earlier European illustrations of leisurely seashore activity do exist, such as those in former cosair Louis Garneray's *Voyage pittoresque* (1823) and elsewhere, as documented in Alain Corbin's *The Lure of the Sea* (1994), they can hardly be called commonplace and are only rarely taken up as a subject for fine art (and which are, by the way, also strongly reminiscent of Japanese paintings and prints preceding them—though this is to broach a subject far beyond the scope of this discussion and must be reserved for a future study).

Renoir, Rochers de Guernesey avec personnages (plage à Guernesey), 1883
Musée des impressionnismes Giverny, image Wikimedia Commons

Utamaro, Women on the Beach at Futami-ga-ura, triptych, 1803/04, MFA Boston (accession no. 11.14506-8)
Monet Giverny collection title: Jeunes filles sur la plage de Futamigaura

Though published after Renoir's painting, Edmond de Goncourt describes this print in his acclaimed *Outamaro*—that artist's reputation being already well-established among ukiyo-e collectors in Europe by then. Calling it 'Pèlerinage à Isé' (1891: 22-23) he introduces it thus:

> "At Ise, a place famed for its sunrises, two sacred rocks rise from the sea. Linked together by a heavy straw rope, these are the Meoto Iwa—the 'Wedded Rocks'—revered as a symbol of conjugal devotion. Newlyweds journey here to pray for a blissful marriage and the blessing of children. Along this same beach, a gathering of women are playfully enjoying themselves. Slipping off their shoes, they wade barefoot into the rolling surf, holding up their long, flowing gowns with both hands."

During the Edo period, the custom of thanksgiving pilgrimages to Ise known as Okage-mairi swept the nation with such enthusiasm that entire families and at times whole villages would be left completely empty, and crowds in the tens of thousands flocking to the beach on any given day. Also known as 'nuke-mairi', that is 'secret pilgrimages'—these were driven by the belief that stealing away from home without the knowledge of one's parents or husband in the case of wives—to worship at Ise Grand Shrine and the beach with the Wedded Rocks would bring enhanced blessings (Goto Shigeki, ed., *Utamaro / Eishi*, 1975: 116).

The Utamaro triptych depicts a group consisting only of women enjoying themselves at the seashore, much like in Renoir's picture, which seems to be composed entirely or predominantly of young women. And as in Renoir, the young women in the ukiyo-e are shown engaged in various activities, some on land (in the lower right), and others dipping their feet into the shallow water—though in the background of Utamaro there are only two 'wedded' rocks, while in Renoir it is a 'family' of three. The long and narrow knobby landmass sticking out like a finger from the right in the midground in Renoir's picture hints at the similarly shaped promontory further in the background to the right in Utamaro's print.

Just as Japanese print techniques of depicting weather, such as rain as straight lines, attracted interest in Europe, so too, aquatic motion—and not only conspicuous turbulence such as waterfalls and high waves, but the portrayal of more placid sea and stream movements—could also be instructive for oil painters. While less minutely executed, Renoir's depiction

of water in the central area of his canvas as small, horizontal, spindle-shaped patches of dark surrounded by clearly contrasting lightly colored areas, is akin to the approach found in woodblock prints. This aspect is more apparent when both are viewed as monochrome images. While one could propose the Dutch painter Johan Jongkind's (1819-1891) seascapes as a source, as is accepted in the case of Monet, the Japanese treatment of water in this fashion precedes Jongkind, and cannot be excluded as a plausible provenance (again, the latter's oeuvre, especially his watercolors, itself merits analysis from a japonisme perspective, as suggested in the case of other renderings of beachside leisure before him; what we may be confronted with is another instance of indirect transmission like that via Whistler to Renoir postulated earlier).

And if Jongkind's waves might explain one aspect of the painting, Renoir's parallels with Utamaro are more multifaceted. Despite the intermediate degree of abstraction with which Renoir has treated the landscape and figures, and though we have a land mass stretching across the distance in Renoir's canvas in place of Utamaro's band of dawning sunlight, nevertheless, the wide, relatively flat sense of the horizon is maintained in combination with, in both pictures, the sea reaching close to the lower edge, leaving only a narrow, cropped band of land—unusual for Western scenes of seashore leisure until then which usually emphasized the expanse of beach sand. Thus, along with the elements examined earlier, the overall highly analogous schematic nature of the two pictures remains intact.

The above are but a few examples of how Renoir shares thematic and compositional traits with ukiyo-e prints across various genres (often coinciding with the kind of prints that Monet collected), such as scenes of seaside leisure, maternity/nursing, female engagement in the arts and reading, hair grooming, and especially bathing.

The print by Isoda Koryusai 'Interior of a Bathhouse' (1770s, MFA Boston), a detail of which follows, is representative of prints like it then circulating in Europe. To the left is Renoir's 'Nude in an Armchair' (1890, private collection, image Wikimedia Commons), depicting a woman wiping her leg near her ankle with a cloth or towel, an item that often appears in his nudes. Renoir's figure and that by Koryusai next to it (left among the three) of a bather wiping her ankle with a 'tenugui' (a small towel omnipresent in Japanese baths), mirror each other in that distinctive pose of theirs, and provide an engaging case for literal influences.

Renoir, Nude in an Armchair, 1890, private collection

Koryusai, Detail of Interior of a Bathhouse, 1770s, MFA Boston

The raw depiction of pubic hair upright against the abdomen on the central figure, likely due to sweat from the sauna or the leg being pressed against the area, was the kind of candid transcription of detail that does not come easily to mind unless witnessed—or conceived with an unusual imagination. The mildly disturbing detail does not fail to make an impression—whether a feeling of embarrassment or a judgement of vulgarity—even on the modern viewer, after all that has gone on in 20th and 21st century art since then. It was this sort of extraneous detail, minor but with the effect of being true to the moment, which seems to have struck a chord with Manet, Cassatt, and Degas, and recalls the latter's monotypes of prostitutes done in 1879-80. Linda Nochlin, though mainly known for her provocative feminist critiques, was in fact a leading scholar of Realism, and in her pathfinding work *Realism* (1971), one of the Penguin 'Style and Civilization' series, described those monotypes thus:

> "Glimpsed as though through a keyhole, totally lacking in any imposed sense of self-conscious moral or moralizing, these monotypes lie at the opposite extreme from Victorian moral hyperbole, both in the freedom of their range and the openness of their formal means, both of which, incidentally, may *owe something to similar qualities in the Japanese woodcuts* which Degas admired and collected." (1971: 205-206, *italics* added)

Nochlin's description of Degas applies to the bathing scene of Koryusai above, and other ukiyo-e bath genre prints as well, where we also find a lack of any imposed didactic moralizing, where depictions are done with freedom and openness, and the figures seem totally unawares or unconcerned that they are being observed. Degas' quick sketches are strikingly

similar in spirit to Koryusai's simple outlines without shadow or much internal elaboration of the human figure, which convey with those essential lines an empathetic sense of the situation. Comparing, for instance, Degas' figure half hidden sunk into the couch in his 'Repos' (c. 1879) to the left below, with the Koryusai figure discussed above, should make the affinity apparent.

Degas, Repos, c. 1879, Wikimedia Commons

Degas, L'Attente, c. 1879, Wikimedia Commons

It is here, in the conception of the Realist idea, that japonisme played an important role—an influence of a different aesthetic, evoking qualities hitherto considered unworthy of fine art; and we cannot assume Renoir was unaffected by what gripped the imagination of other leading artists around him, even if he were to soften it and give it a warm, reassuring aspect.

From another angle, Sylvie Patry, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs and Collections at the Musée d'Orsay, speaking of the late 19th century resurgence of interest in the decorative arts and arabesque design—to which Renoir was inclined and which affected his portrayal of bathing scenes involving multiple figures—points out the influence of Japanese ukiyo-e prints upon those depictions. Regarding 'Bathers Playing with a Crab' (1897, Cleveland Museum of Art), she observes:

> "The theme and composition evoke Japanese prints, the source of all the great decorative revivals of the 19th century, and more specifically Harunobu's *Le Crabe plein d'espièglerie* [the mischievous crab], also dominated by a play of undulating lines." (Musée d'Orsay, *Renoir au XXe siècle,* 2009: 56)

Suzuki Harunobu's 'The Mischievous Crab' (1765-70), known in English as 'The Clinging Crab' (e.g., MET), depicts two women playing in/near shallow waters, one of whom has her kimono edge pinched by a crab, while the other looks on. Renoir's painting depicts nude bathers near open water, one teasing another by holding a crab close to her face. Here the effect (besides the engaging idea of a crustacean as a focal point for feminine playfulness, being a creature neither too harmless nor too instinctively abhorrent as a spider) is of the kind that arises from general impressions, of undulating and interacting lines which form rounded and fluid shapes.

We could add, however, that hints of Renoir's specific bather postures and combinations of them can be found in Japanese bathing scenes, where women slip and fall either by accident, or have been knocked down in a bathhouse brawl. These may account for the humorous, flustered aspect of some of Renoir's poses, such as in the 'Bathers Playing with a Crab'. An example of a Japanese bathhouse print with figures in various postures is the Toyohara Kunichika triptych, which might be translated as 'Competing Complexions Flowering like Irises in a Bath' (1868, 'Hadakurabe hana no shobuyu 肌競花の勝婦湯). In the Monet collection, the French title is: 'Le bain qui donne à la peau le velouté des fleurs' (*Beaux Arts Magazine*, Feb. 2000, p. 27). Another is Ochiai Yoshiiku's triptych, 'Competing Slender Hips like Snowy Willows in a Bath' (1868, 'Kurabekoshi yuki no yanagiyu' 競細腰雪柳風呂, my trans.).

The two can be lined up to make one magnificent mural-like scene of six panels, as at the Library of Congress, DC, where they have been given the combined title: 'Naked bodies compared to irises in hot water, comparing hips to a snow laden willow in hot water'. —Unfortunately, no English translation can do justice to the pithy, overlapping punning in Japanese, which combines ideographic and homonymic wit, where parts of speech merge like links in a chain (of only six characters each)—to evoke floral, seasonal, anatomical, and social imagery in rapid succession, almost simultaneously. In any event, when so viewed together, it is surprising to discover they are the work of two separate artists, as the draftsmanship is indistinguishable and the scenes closely align. Published in the same year with a single publisher's seal (of Echizenya Kaju) for both on the left Kunichika triptych, one surmises they were produced in friendly competition between the two artists, and meant to be viewed as one.

Kunichika, Irises in Hot Water, 1868, LOC

Yoshiiku, Snow Laden Willow in Hot Water, 1868, LOC

For perspective, it should be noted the ukiyo-e masters throughout the Edo period tried their hand at this time-honored genre: in the 17th century, Hishikawa Moronobu; in the 18th century, Katsukawa Shunsho; in the first half of the 19th century, Utagawa Kuniyoshi—to offer only a representative sampling. Their figures conveyed *movements*, sometimes subtle, sometimes undignified, rather than 'poses', each attempting to capture varied fleeting moments of the mundane. Such scenes are also depicted on splendidly colored byobu (folding) screens of the early 17th century, during the Kan'ei era (1624-1644). Indeed, portrayals of outdoor bathing reach back to the 'Choju-giga', sometimes translated as 'Scrolls of Frolicking Animals'—that delightful picture scroll of anthropomorphized frogs and rabbits from the 12th century, the first manga-like panoramic rendering of its kind in world history. For a concise survey of the history of the Japanese bathing genre, see Yoshida Eiji, 'Furoba no eshi' in *The Ukiyoe Quarterly* (No. 2, 1962).

Such scenes were produced in good numbers just around the time Impressionism was gestating, and as remarked upon, Monet owned some of the prints shown above. Whatever specific prints Renoir may or may not have observed, his 'After the Bath' (1888, private collection) of a woman in three quarter rear view, drying the left side of her torso with a cloth; 'Blond Braiding her Hair' (1886, Dallas Museum of Art) of a woman facing back, managing her long hair with both hands; 'Bathers in the Forest' (c. 1897, Barnes Foundation); those red crayon and white chalk sketches from the late 1880s, such as 'The Bathing Spot' (c. 1886-87, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza), and 'Study of Nudes' (c. 1886-87, Dallas Museum of Art); among various other depictions of nudes tending to themselves with cloth, deserve to be considered from this new angle, besides the Ingres comparisons.

An interesting juxtaposition can be created by placing Utamaro's print 'Beauty Taking a Bath' ('Kansenyoku-zu', c. 1799, e.g., MOA Museum of Art, Atami) with Renoir's graphite sketch, 'Nude Woman from the Back Drying her Arm, and Sketches' (c1890-91, Albertina Museum, Vienna) or especially with his pastel in soft reddish hues of a woman with faint green vertical lines suggestive of bamboo, 'Female Nude' (c. 1890, private collection, NY). Once again, while the analogous nature of the same Utamaro's print with Degas' 'The Morning Bath' (1887-90, Art Institute of Chicago) is more readily accepted, it is perhaps Renoir who more closely approaches Utamaro's sense of block-like voluminous corporeal sensuality, but goes unnoticed.

Even Renoir's 'The Great Bathers', also known as 'The Large Bathers' (1884-87, Philadelphia Museum of Art), with its iconic reclining nude in the left foreground, might be included in this group, interpreted until now in purely classical revivalist terms. The Renaissance and Baroque have no limit of contorted poses, but they gravitate to the extremes of 'agony and ecstasy' (to borrow Irving Stone's expression), while the Rococo and Neo-classical are too polished or ethereal. Even François Girardon's 'Le Bain des nymphes' with its elegant figures does not fully account for the awkwardness, the slightly jerky and unbalanced, 'whoops'/'uh-oh' sensation of the figure with both feet off the ground and one hand in the air and the toes sprayed and pointing up; while incorporating an element of 'capture the disconcerting moment' draftsmanship of a Kunichika, Yoshiiku, or Hokusai would.

The same could be said about the mundaneness of the act of toweling by the figure on the left, beside her. There is a sense of disjuncture between the figures themselves, and between the figures and their surroundings as well, as if from different sources joined together. This may be part of the reason Pissarro, for one, found the painting so unsettling (discussed by Bailey in Bell and Shackelford, 2019: 44). Often artists leave hints of their sources in their pictures, and Colin Bailey, in his introductory essay to the heralded 2019 exhibition focusing on Renoir's nudes, 'Renoir, the Body the Senses', pointed out:

> "The brunette at left, whose coiffure is held in place by ornaments of vaguely japonisant design, is shown seated on a white cloth edged in red, her linen petticoat strategically placed to cover her pubis. She protects herself with her right hand, as her braided companion is about to splash her with water. Slightly farther back on the bank, the third nude—whose apricot hair falls behind her shoulders—is portrayed drying her back with a sheet edged in blue. (The banal but intimate gesture of toweling still shocks in its informality.)"
>
> 'Renoir and the Nude: An Introduction', in Bell and Shackelford, 2019: 44

Kunichika, Detail of Irises in Hot Water, 1868, LOC

Renoir, The Great Bathers, 1884-87, PMA

The banality of toweling can hardly be attributed to classical sources, but is found in ukiyo-e images, such as in the Kunichika print where a woman is toweling her back. In fact, in that same panel is a figure who has fallen with one arm raised and both feet off the ground, one held higher and more bent the other with her toes pointing upward, reminding us of Renoir's reclining figure with her arm and feet likewise raised.

Furthermore, we find red and yellow 'kanzashi' hair ornaments in Kunichika's bun-haired bather in the left foreground, just as in Renoir's bun-haired brunette, though Renoir's hairpins are indistinct and smaller, like a secretive intimation or vague remembrance of a past observation. And as in Renoir's other figure sitting nearby toweling her back, one hand outstretched and the other sharply bent close to herself, her head turned in that direction, so too does the Kunichika woman we have just spoken of, likewise with a cloth lined in blue.

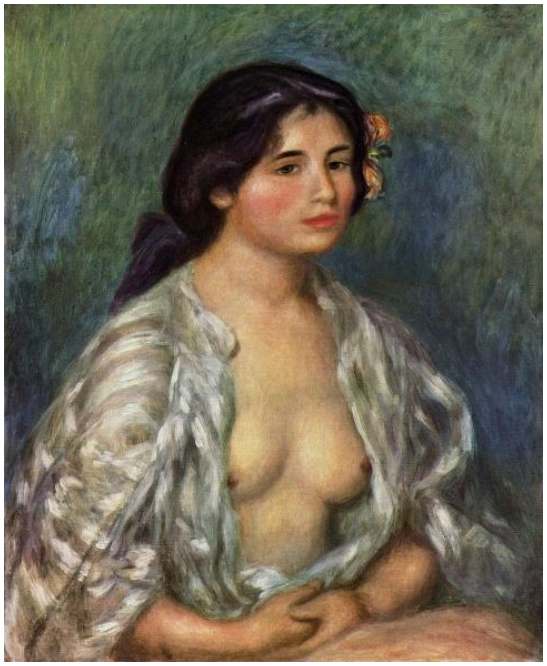
It is almost as if the Kunichika image has been rotated 180 degrees, with minor transpositions of detail. If this was actually what was done by Renoir, it would be a classic case of modified borrowing, or *inversion* (see 'Japonisme Theory' at japonisme.org). He clearly does it with his own sketches such as his 'Le Chapeau épinglé' lithographs, where the 1894 versions face right (e.g., LACMA, accession no. M.64.14.15) and the 1898 versions face left (e.g., MET, object no. 31.82.5). The Kunichika image above is from the missing panel of the same triptych in Monet's collection, referred to earlier.

The Bijinga Ideal in Renoir's Vision of Femininity

But these are more of the exception to Renoir's feminine portrayals, which on the whole may be said to emphasize the opposite quality of complete repose within their surroundings. In that aspect, bijinga portraiture, especially those by Utamaro, though not necessarily always with a point-to-point correspondence of detail to Renoir's images, indeed, despite the deceptively Rubenesque forms of Renoir, conveys a comparable sense of gentleness and feminine intimacy—an uninhibited ease with each other, and a down to earth serenity of the everyday. That shared spirit, however, cannot be understood by an observer unless he or she knows the range and detail of expressions in both Utamaro's and Renoir's women. Most of all is that particular, inexplicably soft 'Utamaro-esque' gaze, which has been unfairly judged by critics as 'dumb' or 'passive' in Renoir's female portraiture. Thus it seems Renoir did not just adopt at times the markedly delineated aspects of ukiyo-e; rather he absorbed the ideal of femininity expressed in the art—and should anyone have the title, surely it is Renoir who deserves it:

'The Utamaro of the West'.

We have already found Utamaro prints useful in discussing Renoir compositions, starting with 'Stone Bridge' in relation to 'Jeanne Samary'. And at each turn of our investigation, the same print artist provided many of the most apt examples: 'Chirinuruwowaka' compared to 'Conversation' and later 'Kiyomizu Temple' to 'Coiffure', to name but a few we examined along the way. Further comparative analyses of the two artists' works should make it amply clear that the above appellation is well-merited—regardless of what one decides is the precise degree of influence of the one artist upon the other. Though we will point out many subtle, identifiable common attributes, their close kinship is primarily one of intangibles; the whole-hearted commitment to a very personal vision of sensuous femininity to be expressed in never ending variation, in pursuit of that essential, ineffable nature, without putting womanhood on a pedestal.



Renoir, Gabrielle with Open Blouse, c. 1907
Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, image Wikimedia Commons

Utamaro, Pipe (Kiseru), from *Fujin sogaku juttai*, 1802-03
Art Institute of Chicago

Renoir's 'Gabrielle with Open Blouse' (c. 1907, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art) makes an alluring pair with Utamaro's 'Pipe' (1802-03, Art Institute of Chicago; also in the BnF Henri Rivière collection), from his series *Ten Types in the Physiognomic Study of Women* (*Fujin sogaku juttai* or jittai, 婦人相学拾躰). In the two pictures a woman is depicted from the waist up, in three-quarter profile, wearing an informal, loose silky garment pulled open in a likewise manner, baring her chest. Her long, luxuriant dark hair is thrown back and bundled. The correspondence of the edge of the garment in relation to the body's contours is striking. A sense of unpretentious wholesomeness permeates both. But what especially resonates is the difficult to describe mood, their expressions that share a very distinct temperamental quality.

While Gabrielle's blouse has kimono-like sleeves with the forearms exposed as does Utamaro's figure, the treatment of the hands, admittedly, is completely different. Renoir has done a perfunctory job of the hands in this piece, while in Utamaro, the hands, while rendered purely in outline, are a masterful job of draftsmanship, and critical in conveying the persona of the subject. However, in certain other Renoir portraits, his hands do recall ukiyo-e, such as 'Woman with a Hat' (1891, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo)—the palms are elongated and flattened, simplified without the care to physical reality found in the rest of the subject. Renoir's approach to depicting hands varies, but they usually show more fullness.

As indicated from even the few examples taken from the collection of Henri Rivière, the kinds of prints admired and owned by French artists in the late 19th century were quite different from the images that commonly circulate today as representative of Japanese prints, which convey only the most conventional of impressions. Rivière, though much younger than Renoir, shared a common acquaintance with Hayashi Tadamasa and a strong link to Georges Rivière, Henri's relative and Renoir's good friend; the collecting of Japanese prints which H. Rivière commenced early in his life in the late 1880s overlaps with the period of Renoir's works here. Except for a handful of extremely iconic images, the finer ukiyo-e works, unforgettably vivid and original, are rarely shown in art histories, whether in Western countries or even in Japan. In any case, Renoir had the opportunity to see a good number of Utamaro prints, given the bijinga artist's popularity in Parisian artistic circles; Monet alone owned 49 Utamaro prints, some of those forming triptychs (Kobayashi Toshinobu, 'Claude Monet's Ukiyo-e Print Collection', 1983: 20).

Sometimes it is a certain angled pose, such as his 'Jeune femme au chapeau noir' (1880-85, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille) shown on the following page, that evokes quintessentially bijinga style portraiture. To the left of the Jeune femme is 'The Face of Oshun, Wife of Denbei' (c. 1800, MFA Boston). Once again, before speaking of concrete parallels of any kind, we should remark that Renoir's works display a noticeable qualitative, emotive resonance with feminine ukiyo-e imagery. And then, point out more specifically: firstly, a conception of volumes; secondly, of the fine balance of delicate and bold pattern; thirdly, a chromatic delicacy and softness what in common Japanese may be termed 'awai' (淡い); fourthly, the technique of creating focus or emphasis within the picture; and fifthly, the sense of spatial organization, including layout pushing the limits of the pictorial frame—are characteristics, among others, which Renoir shares with the print artist Utamaro.

Utamaro, The Face of Oshun, Wife of Denbei, c. 1800, MFA Boston

Renoir, Jeune femme au chapeau noir, 1880-85, PBA Lille

This example leads us to consider Renoir's extensive series of hatted women, which evoke Utamaro's portraits of hatted 'bijin' ('beauties'). Francesca Castellani finds Renoir's variations of 'Le Chapeau épinglé' (or 'The Frilled Hat', 1897, 1898, e.g., MoMA, lithographs alluded to earlier), as having an essential quality akin to ukiyo-e, for, as

> "in Japanese prints, these girls are immersed in a fluid and velvety atmosphere
> that transfigures their physical reality and the fortuitousness of this occasion." (1998: 192)

If it was the case that Renoir did wish to emulate bijinga in his own French way, the hat would have been an excellent device, a substitute for the large raised traditional Japanese hairstyles—kamigata—which were truly varied in shape and ornamental additions such as 'kanzashi' (decorative pins) and 'kushi' (decorative combs) of every design. The closest effect to it in 19th century France would have been achieved by a pinned, decorated hat. This might be inferred in Renoir's 'Jeune femme au chapeau noir', where her black hat and its ornament take the place of the volume and strong sense of presence Utamaro gives Oshun by her large black bun and pins. Renoir's application of a light, watercolor-like 'shadow' above his subject's hat (top edge, center right) assists in matching the weight of Oshun's magnificent bun.

The effect of the bold pattern of Oshun's clothing (acting to counterbalance the 'visual weight' of Oshun's hair) is achieved by the black ornament at the throat of the Jeune femme contrasted to her white frilly collar; while the standing edge of Oshun's kimono, which reaches up covering the back of her neck (and thus helps to visually support the mass of hair and ameliorate a sense of over-extension), is echoed in Renoir by the addition of a few rough brush strokes of black at the back of the Jeune femme's neck, which otherwise seems difficult to account for. At the same time, Oshun's cloth with which she wipes the sweat of her side brow, wraps around the lower part of the picture frame covering her bold patterned clothing, preventing the pattern from 'outshining' the subject, and further heightens our focus upon Oshun's face and hairdo. Renoir creates a comparable effect by the spilling of the backdrop color onto the shoulder of the Jeune femme.

Utamaro was, like Renoir, known for his many portraits of women in hats or elaborate headwear, though this was a popular genre across ukiyo-e artists. To provide some idea of the genre, a few examples follow from the Utamaro series *An Array of Dancing Girls of the Present Day* (*Tosei odoriko zoroi*). The first is his ever so delicate 'Yoshiwara Suzume' (1793/94, Tokyo National Museum), and placed next to it is Renoir's 'Head of a Young Woman in a Yellow Hat' (1894, private collection).

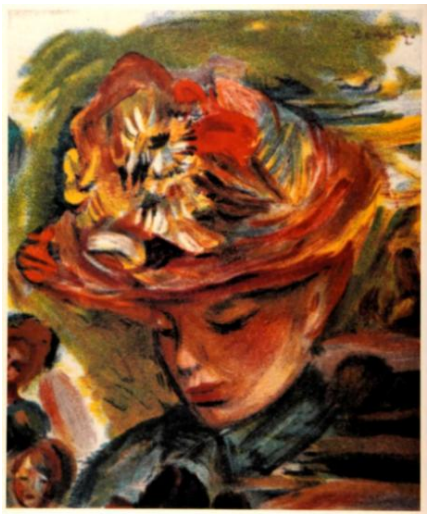
Renoir uses an off-center cropping approach like Utamaro, but more importantly, conveys a similar sense of delicate, tender femininity. In Renoir's yellow-hatted woman, the slightly separated lips, as if habitually open, with their 'puffy' surrounding area, are also characteristic of Utamaro's female portraiture, of which a good number are done in this manner, the classic example being his red sake cup holding 'Geisha of the Northern District' (i.e. of the New Yoshiwara, 'Hokkoku no Geisha' c. 1800; not shown). The hand of Renoir's woman also evokes Utamaro, with its long palm relative to the fingers and expressive quality, as in 'Hanaogi of the Ogiya' from the series *Komei bijin rokkasen* (c. 1795/96; not shown here but the comparison is telling). And in both the hatted woman and the Yoshiwara-suzume, a layered three-dimensional complexity is created by the combination of opposing shapes, textures, and lines around the head and neck—front, back, and above. Finally, Renoir's work displays what Schneider referred to as an emptiness or economical coloring of the background as in Japanese prints, though this is only raised as part of the analogous effect of creating a sense of immediacy, of bringing the subject closer to the viewer.

Renoir, Head of a Young Woman in a Yellow Hat, 1894
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Utamaro, Yoshiwara-suzume, from *Tosei odoriko zoroi,* 1793/94
Tokyo National Museum

Below, Utamaro's 'The Heron Maiden' (Sagi-musume, 1793/94, Tokyo National Museum), also from the same series, has been placed beside Renoir's pastel, 'Woman in a Flowered Hat' (c. 1916-18). The whereabouts of this pastel are unknown according to Elizabeth Elias Kaufman, in her *Renoir* (Minster Books, 1980); it was featured earlier in Jacques Chambaudet's *Renoir: Vision et Technique* (Éditions Pétridès, 1947), a limited edition of lithographs, and there the image is lighter and in that sense closer to Utamaro.

The cropped, close-up framing, the high viewing angle, the relation of the hat to face, all this of course is immediately noticeable, but also of interest is the rendering of the tightly covered neck and facial disposition, including details such as the 'pointy' ear of Renoir's woman, which reflects the pointed shape of the Heron Maiden's ear, or the slightly puckered lips. Regardless of whether any single detail might be coincidental, the overall rendering is not typical of Renoir with its unusually thick black outlines, and suggests Japanese woodblock print influence. The convergence of small detail with ukiyo-e imagery does not necessarily mean this specific work was the source—though that is surely possible—but rather that such details, of which endless variations exist in countless other ukiyo-e, have been picked up by Renoir's eye and brush over time. The corresponding olive color, common in Utamaro's prints, is applied differently, as often seems to be the case when a Japanese aspect is to be suspected in Renoir, and is a phenomenon which can be seen in other artists where japonisme is at work.



Renoir, Woman in a Flowered Hat, c. 1916-18, whereabouts unknown

Utamaro, The Heron Maiden (Sagi-musume), 1793/94, TNM

Now moving to Renoir's full length portraiture, here too, we find these provide us with an example of his use of Japanese elements. His vertical formats of feminine portraiture share much in common with tate-e and hashira-e (pillar prints) often mounted as kakejiku, that is on a hanging scroll, what we have been generically referring to as kakemono, earlier having compared Renoir's 'Rapha Maître' (1871) with Whistler's 'Princess from the Land of Porcelain' (1863-65), and

Kunimasa's painting 'Woman Holding a Fan' (c. 1795-1801). We might also include his pair of portraits at the Hermitage of the Monets, posing on a staircase, done around 1876, one of which we discussed earlier in relation to Japanese fans.

A substantial hiatus exists between Renoir's works in that period and this 'second phase' of more pronounced pillar-print influence, of greater emphasis on closer framing and even slight cropping of full length figures as in Japanese hashira-e. Below to the left is Renoir's 'Girl with a Basket of Fish' and 'Girl with a Basket of Oranges' (c. 1889, The National Gallery of Art, DC), conceived as a pair; and to the right is Isoda Koryusai's pair of woodblock prints, 'Young man and woman presenting the three auspicious symbols associated with the first dream of the New Year' (early 1770s, The British Museum) that would be hung adjacent to each other but mounted separately, though the museum has them placed together on one mat.

Renoir, Girl with a Basket of Fish and Girl with a Basket of Oranges, c. 1889
The National Gallery of Art, DC

Koryusai, First dream of the New Year, early 1770s
© The Trustees of the British Museum

In Japan paired hand-painted kakemono were common, and two or three such kakemono hanging side by side was a standard tokonoma arrangement. Paired woodblock prints were less so, but as pointed out in the British Museum curator comments, that while extant copies of the above Isoda Koryusai double pillar prints are scarce,

> "Nevertheless Koryusai seems to have done at least three different versions, attesting to the popularity of the subject. The British Museum impression may be the only one to survive as a pair from the original edition of this design. ... One can imagine that, mounted as a pair of hanging scrolls, such designs would have been much in demand to hang at the New Year holiday." (www.britishmuseum.org, curator's comments, museum no. 1908,0414,0.1064.a-b)

The widespread notion that paired pillar prints *were* rare is unfounded. True, Koryusai's prints are *now* difficult to encounter; and perhaps his 18th century prints were already scarce by the late 19th century; but not those by Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, or other bijinga artists. In fact, Pierre Rossier's photograph 'Japanese Ladies in Full-dress Winter Costume' (no. 79) in Negretti and Zambra's *Views in Japan* (1st series, albumen print stereoview, 1861, Old Asia Photography Picture Library), one of the earliest known colored photographs of Japan, clearly depicts this kind of print mounted as a set of three kakemono, with two bijinga facing each other on the sides. Most likely Rossier was not using the rarest of prints for his studio props, but items readily available, those he could hang in a studio without much concern for safe-keeping. But whether Renoir saw a Koryusai or a print like it, or a painting of the same scene, he would have witnessed one woman holding a basket with a handle, and in the background a divided view of Mount Fuji. Analogous elements are found in Renoir's double pillar style paintings shown above with their basket-holding women and semi-connected landscapes with mountains in the distance.

On the other hand, another pair of Renoir works mentioned in passing earlier, hark back to an older style of early Edo period kakemono painting, such as those of women performing a fan dance against an untouched silk or paper backdrop, or on gold-leaf screens. Placed on the following page between Renoir's 'Dancing Girl with Tambourine' and 'Dancing Girl

with Castanets' (1909, The National Gallery, London), is the Ukon Genzaemon attributed 'Bugi-zu' (舞妓図, 17th century, Tokyo National Museum). Meaning literally a picture of dance, the characters for 'bugi' can also be read as 'maiko', or dancing girl, as in the title of Renoir's paintings. Perhaps he saw a similar print or painting of a dancer, or an illustration of one in a Western publication, for by the early 20th century, they are found even in books such as Edward Dillon's *The Arts of Japan* (1906: plate between pp. 80 and 81: 'Kakemono on paper: Attributed to Matabei').

Renoir, Dancing Girl with Tambourine, 1909
The National Gallery, London

Ukon Genzaemon, attrib., Bugi-zu 舞妓図, 17th cent.
Tokyo National Museum, image ColBase (top cropped)

Renoir, Dancing Girl with Castanets, 1909
The National Gallery, London

Though with a very different brush technique, in England Albert Moore also adopted the Japanese vertical format for his 'Blossoms' (1881, Tate Gallery, London), which *The Tate Gallery: An Illustrated Companion* (1979, revised 1985: 63) says "is characteristic of his work, and one of his most accomplished paintings". This picture, and his works in general, "aimed to fuse classical drapery, architectural details, and sculptural monumentality with Japanese decorative patterns, ceramics and soft coloring." For it was not only the Impressionists who were profoundly influenced by Japanese art. "Albert Moore transformed the classicism of ancient Greece and Rome into something very new and individual through his interest in Japanese art", demonstrating the widespread expression of an idea at the time, of Japan as the equivalent of a new classical inheritance, one that could be and should be synthesized with the older European tradition, discussed at length in the Afterword of this study. Moore was very good friends with Whistler, and it was with their discovery of Japanese prints that "The two artists thereafter signed their paintings with symbols in the Japanese manner rather than with their names… But it was in the subtle use of line and shape and, particularly, the light and refined colours of the Japanese prints that redirected the work of both artists." (Ibid.) At first glance it might seem to be a purely classical revivalist type of work—just as with Renoir's paintings above—when actually it is a quintessential case of capitalized 'Japonisme', executed as a conscious act of participation in, and identification with, that artistic movement.

Moore was not the first to utilize the Japanese vertical format. We discussed Whistler's princess (c. 1863-1865), and touched upon Renoir's staircase portraits of the Charpentiers (c. 1876); Monet also used the kakemono approach in his 'Japanese Lilies' (c. 1883, Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris), not to mention his wife in Japanese dress (1876), alluded to frequently. Siegfried Wichmann, in his *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western art since 1858* (1981), a tour de force of visual cross referencing, wrote that this "pictorial conception was highly fruitful for European artists" and that not only format, but compositional techniques which accompanied it found in Japanese examples, were instructive. This type of framing would grow increasingly popular with artists, notably the Nabis, the most 'japonisantes' of artists in the 1890s, as they were commonly known. Bonnard, Vuillard, and Denis applied them and were followed by the Vienna Secessionists, Klimt, Kolo Moser, Max Kurzweil, and later Egon Schiele in doing so (1981: 174-175).

Renoir is just slightly ahead of the great burst in kakemono and hashira-e formats with his girls with baskets from about 1889. Again we encounter his keen sense of where the 'market' is headed, though he is more conservative in his general approach, leaving wider margins and employing minimal cropping. As alluded to earlier, his 1909 pair of dancers suggests he reached back to older Japanese sources, recognizing therein an untapped opportunity to express more dynamism, as the Nabi and Secessionist works are rather static. In contrast, Renoir, as in the 'bugi' or 'maiko' dance, emphasizes fluid body movement. The Japanese models more emphatically convey that motion when viewed as a line of dancers in varied poses, such as found in the gold-leaf byobu, 'Buyo-zu' (舞踊図, Suntory Museum of Art, Tokyo) dating to 17th century.

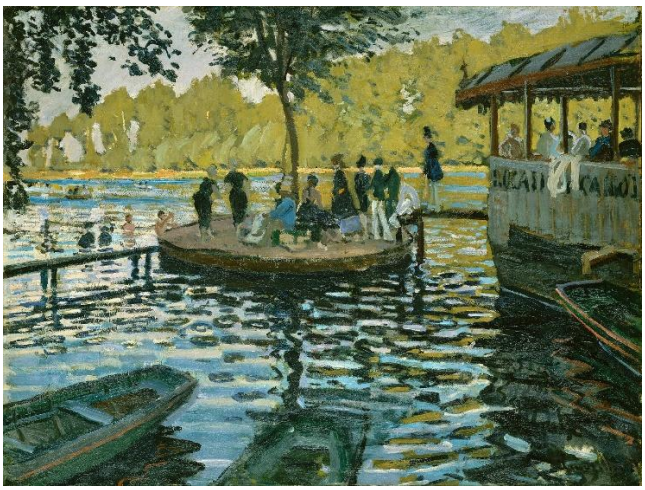
Ukiyo-e Impressions: A Festive Society in Plein Air

Moving beyond portraiture, Renoir's paintings done with Monet at La Grenouillère hint at possible thematic and compositional associations with the boat-outing genre of ukiyo-e, where boats are boarded by crowds of mainly stylish women. Renoir's 'La Grenouillère' (1869, Nationalmuseum Stockholm) and Monet's 'La Grenouillère' (1869, MET), painted together in high spirits of camaraderie, despite the differences of brushwork, color palette, and subject matter focus, share much in common with ukiyo-e compositional techniques of frame cut sterns/prows converging and generally pronounced cropping, not to mention the thematic similarity in capturing the atmosphere of fashionable crowds.

Kunisada II, New Yoshiwara in Temporary Quarters: Owariya Hikotaro Courtesans Viewing Cherry Blossoms, 1863, Tokyo Metropolitan Library

A representative example of a ukiyo-e boating scene by Kunisada II (1823-1880) is shown above, his pentaptych, 'New Yoshiwara in Temporary Quarters: Owariya Hikotaro Courtesans Viewing Cherry Blossoms' (新よし原仮宅おはりや彦太郎抱遊女花の図, 1863, Tokyo Metropolitan Library, my trans.). Whether Monet or Renoir had seen this print is unknown, but what is certain is that Monet owned prints of this genre, including three by Chobunsai Eishi (1756-1829), a contemporary of Utamaro's, as documented in Kobayashi's inventory list with the original Japanese titles (1983: 11-29). Most of the major ukiyo-e artists of the early to mid-19th century produced prints of this kind, depicting crowds of boats outing on spring days or summer evenings. At the very least, there is no denying Renoir's circle of artist friends were familiar with the Japanese boating genre, for their Impressionist portraits are scattered with uchiwa fans depicting scenes with truncated boats, as in Monet's 'La Japonaise' (1876, MFA Boston), and Manet's 'The Lady with Fans' (1873, Musée d'Orsay).

Renoir, La Grenouillère, 1869, Nationalmuseum Stockholm



Monet, La Grenouillère, 1869, Metropolitan Museum of Art

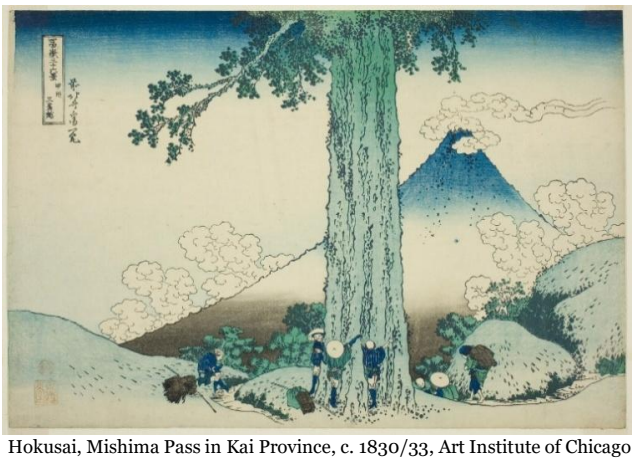
Large roofed pleasure barges with drapes overhanging on the sides, as in the Kunisada II picture (and as seen cropped on the right edge in both oil paintings), in combination with smaller boats, were common in such ukiyo-e compositions, and one wonders if Monet and Renoir chose La Grenouillère in part because it provided a similar package of elements found in Japanese prints. The hanging branches/vines in Renoir's version are certainly reminiscent of Hiroshige's 'Wistaria at Kameido Tenjin Shrine' (1856), from his series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, with its view of the water through low-hanging wisteria. Taking into account as well the greater attention he paid to the fashionableness of the socializing ladies in his picture, Renoir's 'La Grenouillère'—perhaps to the surprise of some—may be deemed more Japanese in spirit and form than Monet's.

But there is still an additional interesting parallel of Monet's and to a certain extent Renoir's, in brushwork technique, to Kunisada II's print—in the expression of water surfaces, which we touched upon earlier. The manner of expressing the slight wavering reflective surface of the water, in its clearly separated aspect, reminds one of both water depictions in woodblock prints and Japanese painting. Look again at the body of water in the second panel from the left in the pentaptych by Kunisada II, and observe how it contains the idea of expressing water surfaces in small, distinct line segments as in Monet. More generally speaking, there is an underlying kinship in drafting 'disposition' towards rendering by small, discrete units, not limited to aquatic surfaces. The latter's brushwork is also analogous to the Hokusai depiction of compactly segmented clouds (which Boudin's approach also echoes), such as in 'Fine Wind, Clear Weather' (Gaifu kaisei, 1830-31, as pointed out by Kobayashi, 1983: 26)—a print also known as 'Red Fuji', and part of the collection at Giverny.

Let us examine another of Renoir's La Grenouillère paintings, 'Bathing on the Seine' (1869, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts). Vertically traversed by a large tree trunk from top to bottom, it reveals a classic and well-recognized ukiyo-e technique often employed by the likes of Hiroshige and Hokusai. An example from the latter, 'Mishima Pass in Kai Province' (Koshu Mishima-goe), again from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (c. 1830-33, Art Institute of Chicago), has been placed side by side with Renoir's painting for ease of comparison. This series was extremely popular and well-known at the time to French impressionist artists in general, Monet having at least six of the series at Giverny, as counted in the aforementioned report of Kobayashi.

The Japanese device of a single trunk or branch that crosses the majority or entirety of the picture space may be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal, such as the striking image of Hiroshige's 'No. 33, Motoyama', from the series *The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido Road*, and these varied approaches may have been instructive for certain Renoir compositions. The resemblance is not limited to composition; even in overall coloring and tone shifts, Renoir may have absorbed something of Hokusai, whose print, depending on the specific version, sometimes comes in deeper hues (the Pushkin Museum image of Renoir's painting has been used to ensure chromatic veracity, since public domain images are often in misleadingly warmer hues).

Renoir, Bathing at the Seine/La Grenouillere, 1869, Pushkin
https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe_and_america/ j/2001_3000/zh_3407/index.php?lang=en



Hokusai, Mishima Pass in Kai Province, c. 1830/33, Art Institute of Chicago

Jacques Dufwa, in his *Winds from the East,* speaking of Monet's version, but also including a discussion of Renoir, sees a marked shift, in a fundamental sense, of engaging in a true 'at the moment' conveyance of perceptual sensations, and a freer use of color, light, and contrast at La Grenouillère—inspired by Japanese artistic imagery:

> "...Monet, precisely in his Impressionism, was to express something quite genuinely Japanese, and some of the works analysed here have already given us an idea of this. ... Here, both of the painters allowed themselves to be completely absorbed by the impressions of the moment upon their senses. ...
>
> Like the Japanese, Monet avoided giving volume by shading; the brush strokes are broad, the contrasts in colour striking. As in Japanese prints, there is a display of exciting and colourful detail against subdued colours and black—light against darkness, both in the depiction of the figures and in the water's reflection of sun and shadow. In the water, light and colour make a glittering dance: movement and transformation in contrast to mass and volume." (1981: 135-136)

But if this is true for Monet, it must be to a good extent for Renoir as well, at least in this particular case. Given the commonly understood divergence in brushwork and focus, and despite the differences that must exist between two unique artistic personalities, Renoir shares with Monet in these paintings at La Grenouillère many of the points raised above. There they were, painting for some two months, at times side by side outdoors, and it would hardly seem reasonable to say that the spirit of Monet, reaching for a more free and spontaneous expression, sparked in no small part by the example of Japan, did not overflow and affect Renoir with an awareness of those sources. Japanese art, as a fundamental force in shaping the goals and practice of Impressionism for Monet, must be said to have had an effect on Renoir's plein-air and chromatic sensibilities, even if primarily in a form of indirect transmission.

A very different, but illuminating case which also combines genre and landscape is one of Renoir's most admired pictures, 'Luncheon of the Boating Party' (1880-81, Phillips Collection, DC), which follows. The idea of Japanese influence in the masterpiece might provoke shrill voices of protest, but reserving judgement for later, let us compare this work with Kubo Shunman's diptych 'Party in Shikian restaurant on Nakazu [Nakasu] island overlooking Sumida River' (1787-1788, British Museum), shown below it.

Renoir, Luncheon of the Boating Party, 1880-81, Phillips Collection

Shunman, Party in the Shikian restaurant, 1787-88 © The Trustees of the British Museum

At first glance, the difference of media—oil paint vs. woodblock print, the obviously contrasting draftsmanship, and of course the cultural settings, are so at odds with each other that they might not strike one as connected in any way. But stepping back, with one's cultural lenses removed, note the general compositional parallels—the combination of figures, still-life, and landscape in one work; and from there move to a closer examination of the organizational details of both pictures.

Starting with the obvious correspondences of, for instance, one man standing leaning against the railing to the left, somewhat aloof; with a woman along the same railing plane, leaning forward (though in the opposite direction); and the other younger fellow to the right sitting with the women—this one description serves both. The manner in which the standing and sitting figures are contrasted, how their facing in scattered directions is amplified, broken up, separated in groups of two or three—these too are of interest. The angle from which they are painted is also similar, back from the left corner of the balcony, only that Renoir is closer, while Shunman has depicted it from beyond the railing, against which Renoir would have had his back. Of course details cannot possibly be identical. The subject matter of the still lifes is naturally different—in Renoir, the wine bottles make a central mass, while in Shunman it is a large red 'tai' fish on a plate, but nevertheless situated center left in the picture frame at similar angles.

In both, the railing divides the two halves of the image, one filled with characters, the other with the landscape beyond. Recognizable are the parallels of compositional technique, such as the use of the striped awning vs. the boarded awning, both cutting across obliquely along the top. The jagged red edge of the awning corresponding to the line of red 'chochin' (foldable hanging lanterns) highlights the physical presence of the characters near them, fluttering or bobbing close to their heads. In each of the pictures, the perspective device of boats, tiny to the extreme, in the distance, convey a sense of a broad expanse beyond, with the opposite bank to add, though barely visible in Renoir. The awning/chochin in combination with the railings accentuates the divide between the social gathering and landscape. Branches approach the dining area; in Shunman one tree in fact rises up within the railing. In Renoir's painting the trees seem to surround the characters in closer proximity and density than may have been the actual case from Renoir's angle at La Fournaise in those days, at least as it appears in old lithographs such as the one shown in Susan Vreeland's novel (*Luncheon of the Boating Party,* 2007); though this is not a critical issue. And it is a skillful transposition by Renoir, if a conscious one, of Shunman's prominent use of yellow clearly outlined or contrasted in places with black, which finds its counterpart in the similarly toned straw hats, highlighted by the dark lines of their hatbands or rims.

Then there are correspondences which surely must be coincidence—but best to mention them for the record, and let the reader decide for himself. It is something that reminds us of all the slight variations of poses found in previous examples which have made sense pointing out only in the greater context of more important parallels. Were it the only similarity, could be dismissed; but instead takes on a curiously intriguing significance—a hint as to how images, once observed, work their way, either consciously or unconsciously, into artistic representation in some unexpected form. That being said, and the following not an assertion which can be argued to any ascertainable conclusion, here it is:

Note in Shunman's Shikian restaurant, the fellow sitting down on the floor to the right. Look closely and you will notice his hands raised, in a most unusual pose, as if imitating a dog with its paws raised (likely the gesture representing a fox in the hand game 'kitsune-ken'). This is a very particular pose for a human being, and any artist who observed this picture could not fail to be curious about it; it would certainly be one detail that would stick in his or her imagination. And we find in Renoir an echo of it, transformed of course, just as we have seen him do repeatedly with Japanese motifs and poses—yes—perhaps you have guessed it, it is there in the dog held by the woman on the left (Aline), with his paws forward towards the woman. It shall be left at that.

But the artistic connection between the two pictures is more than a mirroring of positionings, poses, or colors—there is an agreement of attitudes between the different pairs of figures despite being reformulated by Renoir, and that mood of comfort without concern for social niceties which arrives only after a certain passage of time with the right small group chemistry, that pervades both pictures. The often raised link to Paolo Veronese's 'The Wedding at Cana' (1563, Louvre), as a possible source, is rather stretched and forced, in comparison. Renoir's is no Christ as Renaissance prince presiding over a grandiose banquet as if on a theater stage, done from a perfectly frontal, symmetrical one point perspective. And bringing in Jean-Antoine Watteau's elysian and dreamy 'Embarkation for Cythera' (1717, Louvre), as a source, beyond inspiration for his art in general, is perhaps best characterized by the idiom 'grasping at straws' or even 'anything goes'.

Renoir's painting captures not only the intimate dynamic between the characters, but contemporary bohemian and bourgeois society, and the atmosphere of France's buoyant and epicurean world of leisure and pleasure around 1880, just as Shunman has portrayed Japan's in the 1780s. Both are, in that sense, of exactly the same genre of art, best expressed by the single word: 'ukiyo'—which literally means 'floating world'; pictures of it being 'ukiyo-e' ('e' meaning picture). Renoir's painting is nothing less than a masterstroke of 'French-style ukiyo-e'. Meanwhile, the party on the nakasu (large sandbar) in the Sumida River, the 'Seine of Edo', where the Shikian restaurant was located, away from the crowd, was reached by boat, and thus trips to the island combined as a river outing. Shunman's print, therefore, is the quintessential "luncheon of a boating party". Slowly one realizes Renoir's image is a reflection of that from the other side of the world—as if they were two parallel events—only that the cultural parameters have been changed. Add a table to the scene at the Shikian in Japan, or take away the table at the Fournaise in France—and truly, these two images become in essence one.

Renoir, The Umbrellas, c. 1881-86, National Gallery

Utamaro, Illustration in *Picture Book on Flowers of the Four Seasons*, 1801, MET

In another of Renoir's celebrated works, 'The Umbrellas' (c. 1881-86, The National Gallery, London), we find that here too, the structural and framing techniques are very much those of ukiyo-e artists. A print by Utamaro is provided for comparison, from his *Ehon shiki no hana* (1801, *Picture Book on Flowers of the Four Seasons*, MET, object no.: 2013.854)—widely collected in Europe and America, and still held in major museums on both continents. Utamaro's picture of a tightly packed crowd with angled parasols, with dramatic cropping, is but one enlightening example of how clear precedents exist in Japanese art for many of Renoir's compositional schemas.

Even Renoir's principal female figure on the left, painted later than the impressionistic right side, in what is considered a shift to a more realistic style of representation, also hints at bijinga postures of the parasol/rain or snow genre, in the peculiarities of her pose and tilted head in combination with that slight manner of holding up her skirt. Utagawa Kunimaru (1793–1829)'s print 'Woman with Umbrella and Dog in Snow' (c. 1815-21, MFA Boston) is one example; Utamaro's 'Orie, épouse de Jûtarô, contrainte de se prostituer' (1806, Musée Guimet, Paris, 綾津理模様竹の一節　忠臣講釈辻君之段　重太郎女房お里ゑ), translated variously into English as 'Orie, wife of Jutaro forced into prostitution' or 'Beauty in the Rain', depicts a woman whose posture, though more pronounced, is typical of ukiyo-e that might be raised as an additional ingredient to classical models in Renoir's draftsmanship.

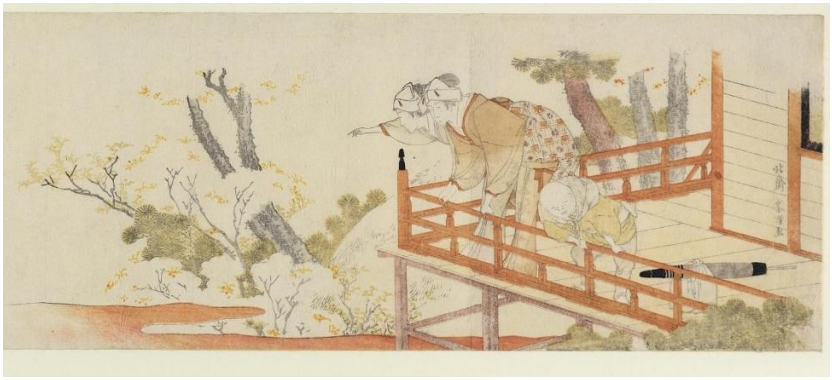
Sophie Monneret was one of the few who did raise the possibility of a Japanese aspect to 'The Umbrellas', though in the vaguest terms, stating: "Some have seen a reference to an engraving by Manet here, as well as the influence of Japanese art." (*Renoir,* 1990: 98) Much more deserves to be said, and furthermore, that certain engraving by Manet may very well have been inspired by similar Japanese images. —For, as anyone who has spent time with European collections of Japanese art soon comes to realize, what is often identified as a primary, local influence is merely the most conspicuous of a long line of equally convincing older sources—resting, perhaps, in a nearby ukiyo-e collector's library.

Let us briefly discuss a certain canvas of Renoir's for a differing usage of Japanese compositional elements and layout. As opposed to 'The Umbrellas', his 'La Place (or Le Square) de la Trinité' (1875, RISD Museum of Art, Providence) is a work full of sunny, glittering brightness outstanding even for Renoir. Instead of the massing technique of figures and objects above, we have social and landscape elements combined in a manner like prints of cherry blossom viewing.

A cropped off balcony in Renoir's picture, with only its corner jutting out in view with two women, is situated in the lower right corner of the foreground, creating a distinct social space cut off from the rest of the picture with a vista unfolding beyond, like in so many prints by Hokusai. One of the women indicates something of the view with one finger slightly raised. A large single tree trunk to the left vertically traverses the painting in a decidedly bent manner, leaning further to the left, and is truncated at the top by the picture frame so that only leaves reappear from the top edge. This, with the balcony in the right corner, creates a 'frame within the frame', a sensation of comfortable settling and inclusion of the observer into the painting, while accentuating the sense of 'looking out onto' the layers of midground and background of the park space beyond.

Similar conceptions appear in ukiyo-e, and surimono such as Katsushika Hokusai's 'Two women and one boy viewing cherry blossoms on balcony' (1797-98, British Museum, no. 1919.6-1.01), where two women and a child overlook a balcony corner on the right edge of a long horizontal print, with one woman pointing with her little finger to something in the distance. A tree trunk to the left bending towards the left, and an unfolding panorama is suggested by the technique of gradually fading colors and lines outward. The rest of the space where the vista would be is covered with lines of verse, lyricizing what would have been seen for the imagination to complete instead. Shown below to the right is a detail of it, with the poems on the left side cropped which extend approximately the same length as the illustrated portion.

Renoir, La Place de la Trinité, 1875, private collection
Wikimedia Commons, tint adjusted to match original



Hokusai, Two women and one boy viewing cherry blossom on balcony, 1797-98
Detail, right side, verse on left side cropped © The Trustees of the British Museum

Any contextual analysis of Renoir's painting in relation to other Impressionist paintings of terraces overlooking panoramic views should start with Monet's 'Garden (or Terrace) at Sainte-Adresse' (1867, MET), one of the earliest of its kind. Geneviève Lacambre, instrumental in bringing about one of the most definitive exhibitions of Japonisme in Paris (1988) to date, and Louvre's chief curator at the time, wrote "Monet himself, and Renoir in 1869, spoke of the *Terrace at Sainte-Adresse* in relation to Japan: which work by Hiroshige or Hokusai (of the very kind Whistler was well-acquainted with at the time) served as his source?" (*Le Japonisme*, 1988: 30).

It is clear that among the Impressionists, at least for Monet and Renoir, these terrace-type compositions were associated with Japan. In Monet's painting, we also have a cornered terrace, though facing in the opposite direction, and its space is much larger, but very much like that in a Siebold illustration from his encyclopedic tract on Japan, *Nippon* (vol. II, plate XXI, as Lacambre pointed out), and also characteristic of many ukiyo-e prints of this genre—a favorite theme especially for Hokusai, and a print of this kind by him was in Monet's possession. The French language version of the Metropolitan Museum of Art description of the terrace at Sainte-Adresse includes the following:

> "Les spectateurs avertis de cette époque ont peut-être fait le rapprochement avec les estampes japonaises aux couleurs vives, imprimées à partir de gravures sur bois, dont Monet, Manet, **Renoir**, Whistler et d'autres de leur cercle étaient de fervents collectionneurs. Cette composition pourrait justement avoir été inspirée par une gravure du Japonais Hokusai, qui se trouve encore aujourd'hui dans la maison de Monet à Giverny."
>
> (www.metmuseum.org/fr/art/collection/search/437133, bold added)
>
> (Discerning viewers of the period may well have drawn a parallel with the vividly colored Japanese prints, struck from woodblocks, of which Monet, Manet, **Renoir**, Whistler, and others within their circle were avid collectors. Indeed, this very composition may have been inspired by a print by the Japanese Hokusai, which can still be found today in Monet's home at Giverny.)

In curious contrast, the English version only says: "His approach—daring for its time—reflects his admiration for Japanese prints." (www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437133) Renoir's layout of spaces and subject matter, of course, is not identical to Monet's. Instead of an ocean, his overlooks a large garden area, and the balcony is deeply truncated, more in line with the depiction of the balcony viewing of cherry blossoms that characterize Japanese prints; and the pink swaths of flowers centrally placed in Renoir's picture function to evoke the same spring associations. As usual with the artist, the connection is discreet, and takes place in an entirely French context.

Ukiyoe-Style Topography in Mountain, Valley, and Coast

These reflections of Japanese imagery and composition in Renoir's oeuvre, however, are not limited to social settings or the human form, nor even the floral or plant shapes discussed earlier. The same can be said of his more panoramic landscapes as well. We hinted as much in our discussion of Japanese painting much earlier, comparing his 'Marine' (Blick aufs Meer, 1879/80, Kunsthaus Zürich) with a work by Ike no Taiga. In contrast to that pair of misty, infinitely spreading, horizontally-oriented 'bird's eye' views, with their soft mixing of a restricted palette of hues, below we find Renoir's vividly contrasting multi-color sectioning of steep, overhanging cliffs at Dieppe, which traverse the vertical length of picture frame and are viewed from a side angle so as to capture the dramatic carving out of the rocks, echoing Hiroshige's towering cliffs at Hakone, with their clear partitioning of an eye-catching array of colors, and also viewed from an angle so as to highlight the concavity of the formation. And as is often the case with Renoir, besides the overall analogous qualities that can be raised, he includes specific, corresponding details, perhaps as a clue for posterity of his indebtedness: here the dab of red which corresponds to a similarly positioned and colored rock in Hiroshige.

Renoir, La côte près de Dieppe, 1879
Kasser Mochary Foundation, Montclair, NJ Image Wikimedia Commons

Hiroshige, Hakone: View of the Lake, from *53 Stations of the Tokaido Road, 1833/1834*
MFA Boston (accession no. 11.23086)

Even Néret admits to 'Renoir's Bay of Naples, Evening' (1881, Clark Art Institute) as "bearing a strange resemblance to a Hiroshige print" (2026: 197)—perhaps referring to 'Clearing weather at Awazu' (1834-35, e.g., MFA, accession no. 21.6800). Others to be raised are Renoir's 'Wash-house at Bas-Meudon' (c. 1875, Clark Art Institute), 'Cliffs at Berneval' (or 'at Pourville', 1879, private collection), and 'Rocks at L'Estaque' (1882, private collection) as works strongly reminiscent of Hiroshige and Hokusai landscape conceptions.

This applies to Cezanne as well, with whom Renoir shared time together painting at L'Estaque—though that connection, between Cezanne and ukiyo-e landscapes, has also been generally overlooked. For those interested, the following are recommended for starters: Tohoku University Professor Emeritus Tanaka Hidemichi's 'Cezanne and "Japonisme" ' in *Artibus et Historiae* (Vol. 22, No. 44, 2001); Japan's National Museum of Western Art produced *Hokusai and Japonisme* exhibition catalogue entries 218 to 220; as well as Klaus Berger's section on 'Cezanne' in his classic *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse* (1992: 112-119). According to Georges Rivière—who was "undoubtedly one of Renoir's closest friends" (J. Renoir, 1962: 164)—in his *Renoir et ses amis* (1921), Cezanne came first in regards to japonisme:

> "Parmi les peintres impressionnistes, il y en eut aussi qui tirèrent parti de l'esthétique et de la technique de l'art japonais. Ce fut le cas de **Cézanne**, de Degas, et de Monet." (1921: 58, bold added)

Which leads us to ask: Did Renoir share with Cezanne an awareness of Japanese-style landscapes while they painted in L'Estaque? Could they have chosen the location because it evoked those landscape forms—just as was possible for van Gogh to go south in search of a place closer in light to his prized Japanese prints, and probable for Cezanne that Hokusai's multiple depictions from multiple vantage points of Mount Fuji aided him to do the same with Mont Sainte-Victoire, using similar compositional devices as Hokusai?

Next to Renoir's 'Rocks at L'Estaque' is Utagawa Hiroshige's 'Autumn Full Moon at Ishiyama' (Ishiyama shugetsu), from the series *Eight Views of Omi Province* (1834-35, MET, object no. JP2847). The parallels go beyond general delineations and massing techniques; they reach to specific rock shape and crevice, interspersing of vegetation, the positioning of areas of open space.

Renoir, Rocks at L'Estaque, 1882, private collection

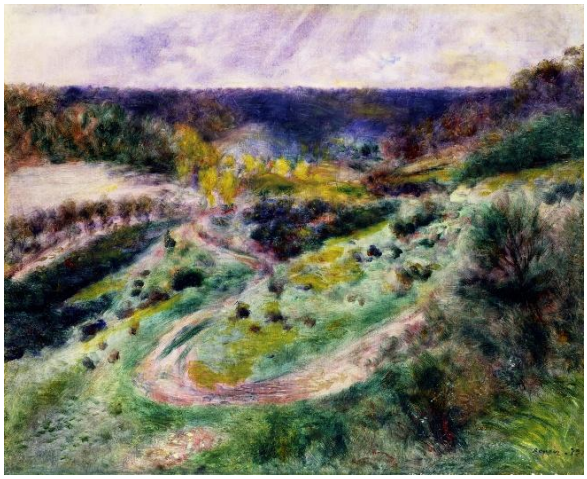
Hiroshige, Autumn Full Moon at Ishiyama, 1834-35, MET

The compositional and morphological/topographical parallelisms which can be found across so many cases present such a mass of circumstantial evidence that no reasonable explanation can be given other than that Renoir did emulate Japanese prints; or, that he achieved such a synchronicity of mind from his effort to absorb those compositional principles to be intuitively led to recognize and capture the peculiar landscapes which harmonized with the Japanese aesthetic spirit to an incredible degree. One finds the former a more rational explanation, and one is tempted to guess he went further: that he shaped his outdoor landscapes to conform with the Japanese imagery which had planted itself in his consciousness.

As there was tremendous rivalry in Japan to produce ever more original and memorable scenic views with the publication of every new folio series that came out over the years by younger generations of artists, emulating the dual genius of Hiroshige and Hokusai, what specific prints Renoir saw cannot be determined with absolute certainty, but it is likely that he did see some of those shown here, given the overwhelming number of faithful correspondences which exist between them.

One final juxtaposition awaits us: Renoir's 'Road at Wargemont' (1879, Toledo Museum of Art) vis-à-vis Utagawa Kunisada's 'Maple-leaf Viewing' (1832, MFA Boston) from an untitled series of landscapes. Kunisada (otherwise known as Toyokuni III, 1786-1865), along with Hiroshige and Utagawa Kuniyoshi, was one of the most popular ukiyo-e masters reaching the peak of their creativity in the second quarter of the 19th century. (The following commentary by the author was written before realizing later this very Kunisada print was part of the Monet collection, giving further credence to the idea that Renoir may have observed it—an example of what one might call the predictive capacity of japonisme theory in the case of Renoir; that is to say, the hypothesis of Japanese influence being afterwards reinforced with further confirmatory evidence of some kind.)

Kunisada, Maple-leaf Viewing, from an untitled series of landscapes, 1832, MFA



Renoir, Road at Wargemont, 1879, Toledo Museum of Art

Once again, as we saw earlier, we come across something Renoir did with his own works, and likely to Japanese woodblock print images. The general aspect of Kunisada's view seems as if it has been 'rotated' approximately 120 to 180 degrees. In Renoir's painting we are looking at a very similar type of topography to that in Kunisada's image, but from the other end of the print landscape, so that we see the winding road dipping sharply below us and the river to the left instead of the right as in Kunisada. There is no bridge over the river in Renoir, but a strange, rather unnaturally thin promontory extends

downward into the river like Kunisada's bridge. The path where the travelers stand by the trees in Kunisada is about the point where the trail goes out of sight by the trees in Renoir's image. Like Kunisada, the path in Renoir dips slightly in the middle, and rises to the bend. The body of water visible on the other side of the elevated path in Kunisada, shaped like a triangle in the center of the picture, comes in a dark navy in some versions of the same print (e.g. Art Institute of Chicago), which is suggested by the dark triangular growth also in the center of Renoir's composition. The combination of steep angled slope with the undulating path on an area of sparse vegetation and tree clusters at some distance from each other, with dramatic changes in elevation over short distances, and all that combined with distant views, creates a landscape of interest in both cases.

The orientation of the curving path, however, is basically unchanged, keeping the wide arc of the path in our direction. However, the row of trees along the riverside in the distance is on the opposite bank in Renoir (for otherwise the river would be hidden from sight). Kunisada has created a more psychologically satisfying landscape with its balance of concavities and convexities, while Renoir has produced an intentionally disorienting prospect more in the spirit of Manet, conveying a unique sensation to our semi-circular canals—of manageable yet discomfiting imbalance—exacerbated by the contrast of the unruly foreground and midground versus the perfect, serene horizon.

Perhaps these examples are at least sufficient for the reader to realize the need to discuss Renoir's works in the wider context of Japanese precedents, given the enthusiastic reception of Japanese art at the time. Not to do so, as in the case of the Rocks at L'Estaque or 'The Umbrellas', for instance, in reference to the ukiyo-e parasol and rain genres, might be judged scholarly negligence or at best blissful ignorance—which would never be allowed to pass were the tables turned, that is if we were discussing a Japanese painting with conspicuous European precedents. The charge of a widespread 'Marginalization of Japonisme in Western Art History' (Greg M. Thomas, in *Japan and Japonisme*, 2025: 83-102) seems not unfounded.

The Logic of Resemblance—Coincidence or Evidence

Let us pause here for a moment to review the situation, and confront the insistence on the coincidental nature of these parallels by those of an opposing opinion which can be readily anticipated. We must delve somewhat into epistemology, and derive, to a certain extent, a theory for distinguishing between coincidence and non-coincidence when likenesses are identified. The naysayer argument is simply a blanket one, which offers no means of refutation, and neither distinguishes between nor recognizes the following criteria: 1) the degree and quality of similitude in individual cases of comparison; 2) the number of such incidences, that is the quantity of similitude; 3) the systematicity of structure or pattern within the entire set of cases; and 4) the convergence of circumstantial with physical and testimonial evidence.

All of the above we have witnessed up to this point, and will continue to observe, in relation to Renoir's japonisme. To elaborate, *circumstantial evidence* here refers to analogous images of Renoir and Japanese art, as well as instances of possible 'indirect transmission' via artists such as Whistler or Monet, as well as various other points of contact with Japanese art. *Physical evidence* would be objects undisputedly identified as Japanese within the works of Renoir as fans, kimonos, flowers, and the like. *Testimonial evidence* would naturally include the words and writings of Renoir and those intimate with him directly pertaining to Japan. We have seen a concentration of parallels with particular sources such as Utamaro, which concurs with the idea of logical parsimony or the more plausible unity than disunity in determining provenance, and that artists, like all human beings, are creatures of habit and imitation, returning to proven sources of success. Whereas other attributions often function to explain only a particular facet of his style at any one time, the theory of Japanese influence provides a widely applicable explanatory power to various aspects of Renoir's oeuvre. Furthermore, not only have we observed a common thread of Japanese artistic inspiration, and within that, a leaning towards particular artists, we can also identify in certain cases, subtle yet extremely specific, almost 'Morellian' fingerprint-like clues of that link from accessible, widely distributed Utamaro or Hiroshige prints, for instance.

And as already suggested, japonisme theory has a predictive dimension as well, in the sense that confirmatory sources accessible to Renoir can be located after a hypothesis of influence based on a certain analogous Japanese image has been postulated. Besides the Kunisada print on the preceding page discussed in relation to Renoir's 'Road at Wargemont' (1879), ukiyo-e similar to those the author independently selected for comparison have been found in Monet's collection after perusing the illustrations in the G. Aitken and M. Delafond edited *La Collection d'estampes japonaises de Claude Monet* (La Bibliothèque des arts, 1998).

Just to offer a few examples, concerning 'La Place de la Trinité' (1875), while the Hokusai surimono provided by this author for comparison is not in the collection, another quite similar, collaborative piece by Kunisada and Hiroshige, 'Akashi' (fig. 95, p. 96) of the series *Furyu Genji* (1853), is to be found. And instead of Utagawa Kunimaru's print 'Woman with Umbrella and Dog in Snow' (1815-1821, MFA Boston), discussed in relation to Renoir's 'The Umbrellas' (1881-86), we find Kunisada's 'Fuyu' (i.e. 'Winter', early 1830s) of the series *Shiki no uchi*, which depicts the same winter scene with a dog, and critically, possesses a *closer* resemblance to Renoir's woman than the bijinga images selected by the author. Noteworthy in regards to Renoir's 'The Boy with the Cat' (1868) is Toyokuni I's 'Matsusuke Fu' (1809-1814, fig. 84, p. 87),

of a kabuki actor (in a female role) hugging a kitten, from the series *Ukiyo butaiko*, in the Monet collection, which, by the way, should also be compared to Renoir's 'Julie Manet' (1887) discussed in context of his boy and cat. Or, regarding his 'La Promenade' (1875-76), very similar prints of courtesans with two child attendants are part of the collection by the same Toyokuni II/Toyoshige ('Aimi with kamuro Tsuruno and Kameshi', fig. 87, p. 88), among others portraying the trio of figures. One suspects various influences proposed in this study will be eventually validated over time by specific sources in Renoir's proximity.

Let us consider the wider implications of rejecting outright the four criteria listed above. The denial of the first—the importance of the degree and quality of similitude—is to nullify with one stroke the science of forensic document examination, since handwriting recognition and signature validation rely purely on varying correspondences of micro-forms. Even forensic ballistics is determined by the degree of 'pattern agreement' of striations, and not an absolute match. In fact it overturns the basis of copyright and intellectual property law—'substantial similarity', making any case of plagiarism for all intents and purposes untenable. The second, that the overall quantity of such incidences can be ignored, pulls the rug from under the foundation of statistics—the concept of statistical significance—for this too, could be interminably attributed to mere coincidence if the number of positive correlations is irrelevant. Medical trial results could then always be attributed to placebo effects, becoming a blanket evasion analogous to the japonisme counterarguments. While to deny the third criterion, that of structural and pattern recognition in the entire sample as 'seeing into things', subverts not only the core insights of Indo-European historical linguistics—which is based precisely on the organizability and categorization of such parallels, but also, it would seem, render useless the system of archaeological dating based on ceramic typology and seriation.

Finally, the fourth assertion, that while artist or even art dealer testimony can be taken at face value, pictorial correspondences constitute a weak, purely 'formalist' line of inquiry to be treated separately—why this contradicts jurisprudence at the axiomatic level, flying in the face of the concept of corroboration and 'consilience', where a convergence of circumstantial evidence with physical proof and testimony is more weighty than any single type of evidence alone. In other words, the opposition to Japanese influence fails to recognize the value of a totality of evidence, of cumulative weight considered to yield a collective probability exceeding the sum of the parts. If present norms of determining Eastern influence on Impressionism by modern scholarship were to be applied to criminal law, innocence or guilt would be determined upon hearing the defendant's self-serving testimony or by singular expert opinion, where those of like opinions act simultaneously as judge and jury. By labeling compelling similitude as mere happenstance, by sidestepping theories of greater explanatory scope, and by projecting an almost angelic 'whole-truth' character onto a few artist statements and their own interpretations, contemporary critics of japonisme are in a sense violating the 'sine qua non' of reasonable inductive verification itself upon which advances in scientific knowledge and social justice have been based.

And we must not think it is difficult or unusual to be led thus astray. The strength of what in social psychology is known as 'confirmation bias' is not to be underestimated in the formation of academic opinions, whether it be due to an Ambroise Vollard in 1920 or a Theophilus Painter in 1923. The latter being a once highly respected authority in cytogenetics, now notorious for having miscounted the human diploid number as 48 rather than 46—an error universally accepted by the scientific community for three decades solely on account of Painter's reputation. Subsequent researchers, and this worldwide, seeing only 46 chromosomes under their microscopes over the years, would nevertheless report 48, assuming the error was theirs. The present state of affairs regarding the interpretation of Renoir, and japonisme in general, is highly reminiscent of cytogenetics before 1956—when the mistake was finally corrected by geneticists Joe Hin Tjio and Albert Levan.

This rectification was, one could logically propose, thanks to Hokkaido University Professor Makino Sajiro and researcher Nishimura Isao's advances in chromosome spreading and analysis methods in 1952 (see S. Makino and I. Nishimura, 'Water-pretreatment squash technic; a new and simple practical method for the chromosome study of animals', *Stain Technology*, Vol. 27, No. 1 [January], pp. 1–7, 1952; published clearly before T. C. Hsu's pretreatment article 'Mammalian Chromosomes in Vitro: I. The Karyotype of Man', *Journal of Heredity*, Vol. 43, Issue 4, [July], pp. 167–172, 1952). Makino and Nishimura's innovations preceded and paralleled the methods employed in the discovery of the correct chromosomal number—though the contribution was not one admitted by Tjio and Levan or Hsu, nor was it generally recognized in the scientific literature. And such a claim would be hotly contested today—perhaps to no surprise to the reader by now. For indeed, should one have an interest to excavate the depths of this topic, he would discover a parallel marginalization of the contributions of Japanese science which exists side by side to that of Japanese art. But we shall pursue this no further; we have exceeded the horizons of our study to regard a wider perspective which, however, may be helpful in understanding the depth of the problem concerning the acceptance of historical realities under examination.

Part III

Maurice Sérullaz, cited earlier—whom we should stress was unquestionably one of the leading authorities on 19th century French art in France, and first curator of the Musée national Eugène-Delacroix, later Chief Curator of the Louvre Department of Prints and Drawings (as well as professor at the École du Louvre, author of the *Phaidon Encyclopedia of Impressionism*)—included Renoir among the seven artists strongly influenced by Japanese art, whom he specifies by name in his *The Concise Encyclopedia of Impressionism*:

> "Finally there was one last and very marked influence on the young painters of the time, and that was Japan and everything Japanese. … French artists got to know Japanese prints, and the great Japanese engravers such as Utamaro (1755-1806), Hokusai (1760-1849) and Hiroshige (1797-1858). To Western eyes, the general appearance of these prints with oblique off-centre effects, simplified forms and presentation, as well as their delicate colouring, were unusual and fascinating, and many artists, among them Manet, Monet, **Renoir,** van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin and especially Degas, as well as the Symbolists and the 'Nabis', were influenced by Japanese art." (Sérullaz, trans. ed. 1974: 12, bold added)

Reorienting the Artist Eye and Hand

Not to be overlooked is Sérullaz's comment that such influence emanated from "everything Japanese". For while he brings up ukiyo-e artists, there is a reason for his added emphasis on Japan's impact as a cultural entity in all its manifestations—and Renoir is a prime example of that. As documented in Herbert's study of Renoir's personal writings, the artist absorbed the lessons of multiple artistic media, from ceramics to sculpture to ukiyo-e, and it was the 'everything' that was important to Renoir, in contrast to the well-known focus upon woodblock prints of Manet, Monet, or Degas.

The impact of Japanese kogei in all its varied forms—including those of washi paper (雁皮, 三椏, 楮, etc.) and mixed metallurgy (赤銅, 四分一, 黒味銅, etc.)—upon French arts, crafts, and industry was truly wide-reaching, and cannot possibly be discussed here meaningfully; one might start with the Society for the Study of Japonisme organized 5th Hatakeyama Symposium papers for 'Kogei and Japonisme—re-examining 'modern' in industrial and artistic applications' (*Studies in Japonisme* 35, 2015). Concerning metallic tints and textures Edward Dillon in his *The Arts of Japan* (1906: 127) wrote, "It is the despair of our European workers in metal who have attempted in vain to imitate the effects obtained by the Japanese." This was still the case in the early 20th century, and to a good extent, even today.

The 'everything' of Japan had multi-dimensional meanings, for not only was the full range of artistic media studied, but the full range of subject matter those arts covered—from octopuses and bats to sericulture and mining—this wealth of subject matter from which the Impressionists and artists after them drew heavily has not been given the credit that is due. Everything also meant the host of new found techniques going beyond those raised by Sérullaz, transformative of sensory cognition. A greater spatial 'malleability'—of figure to ground, of void with emphasized delineation, of layering figure with solid and porous transversals, and what Mallarmé called in his 1876 essay on Impressionism "natural perspective", an accentuated, perceptually impactive foreshortening, an "artistic perspective which we learn from the extreme East—Japan for example" (translated in Moffett, 1986: 31). One point perspective, which Japan originally adopted from Europe in the 18th century, but now, as Gerald Needham explains, in the Japanese transformation, the eye is rapidly funneled to the back of the scene, "where the lack of any object to fix on forces his attention quickly over the remainder of the canvas"; and the "picture is thus received in a single glance (*as an impression*) without sacrificing the actual depth of the landscape or its atmospheric qualities." (Weisberg, et al., 1975: 117, *italics* original)

Then the liberation of formatting—pronounced vertical, horizontal, or irregularly shaped framing, and all manner of partitioning and collaging. And of course the vast repertoire of imagistic effects—if living more dynamically life-like, whether night or day, mid-air or underwater; if elemental more ingeniously abstracted, whether solid, fluid, or gas; or displaying novel forms biomorphic, angular, and ideogrammatic; merging pattern and place, overlaying figure and script; employing magnification, metonymy, and silhouette of subject matter to novel effect. As the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens, popularly esteemed (especially by American artists and critics) at the time as representative of the modern movement, wrote in his *Impressions on Painting* (1886) encapsulating his ideas in pithy aphorisms: CII., "The Japanese have better rendered all the manifestations of the sun and moon than the ancient or modern masters." (1886: 21)

And even a probing of new psychological dimensions—different mannerisms, facial expressions, and moods, individual or communal, across gender and age, with new expressions of intimacy and formality, ranging from imagined creatures ('yokai') to humans and dolls that confound as neither fully one or the other. —The list goes on—for the usual descriptions of Japanese art hardly do justice to the imaginative wealth which captivated so effusively the most creative spirits of an age.

A Conception of Japanese Harmony within 'Irregularity'

However, it was not merely that the outward forms and colors of a wide range of Japanese arts and crafts were assimilated into Renoir's work, or that an astonishing diversity of subject matter along with aspects of technique were reformulated into a Western narrative. Rather, as Oshima Seiji in his chapter on Renoir (in *Japonisme*, 1992: 195-198) argued, it was at a fundamental level of conceptualizing Art and Nature, the Self versus the Other, that Renoir—more keen on philosophical issues than he is usually credited for—in his ideas, mirrors much of what was defined as 'Japanese' (including how it contrasted with Western/French civilization) as put forth by French authors such as the art critic Ernest Chesneau (1833–1890). Oshima finds strong parallels between Renoir's beliefs and those pertaining to Japan in documents such as Chesneau's speech for a federation of applied industrial arts, but also earlier in his views on Japanese art presented at the Paris World Exposition of 1867, and later in his tract, *Le Japon à Paris* (1878). Here too, the emphasis was not on ukiyo-e vs. Western painting, but more on a polemic for European arts as a whole, based on the instructional example of that Eastern culture.

Idealized or stereotyped as it may have been, 'Japan' was nevertheless the revelation of a truer sense of balance, beyond what symmetry offered through asymmetry and irregularity. It was the attainment of a more intrinsic congruence of form and purpose, form and materials; exemplifying colors grounded in the native geography and climate; demonstrating a sense of oneness and directness of perception and action regarding nature, art, and reality. In short, ideas contained in the core concept of 'wa'—that is, harmony, a concept extolled from the days of Prince Shotoku in his constitutional edict of 604. Henceforth it was to be passed on, in one form or another: in waka poet Ki no Tsurayuki's 'gentling' by empathy through verse (c. 905); to Soto Zen priest Dogen's idea of 'wago' (和合, c. 1231-1253); to polymath encyclopedist Kaibara Ekiken's comprehensive harmony, universal yet personal, tangible and intangible (1710-1714); to the moral philosopher Ito Jinsai's idea of it as ethical force (1712); to that trailblazer of modern literary criticism Motoori Norinaga's defining of Japan through it (1798); down to cultural interpreter for the West Okakura Tenshin (1903), modern philosopher Nishida Kitaro (1940), and the contemporary haiku poet Hasegawa Kai (2009)—each different but valuing the same underlying 'unity as truth' as a way of life.

Japanese literature was filtering into Europe at the time as touched upon before, via writers such as Judith Gautier (for whom we might recall Monneret thought he held a strong romantic interest), in her masterpiece of translation, the *Kokinwakashu* of Ki no Tsurayuki, where we find at its beginning:

> "Ébranler le ciel et la terre sans force brutale, émouvoir les dieux et les génies invisibles, harmoniser les rapports de l'homme et de la femme, adoucir le cœur du guerrier, c'est là le but de la poésie."
>
> (From 'Par Tsoura-youki', trans. by J. Gautier in *Poëmes de la libellule*, Paris, 1885)

This idea of aesthetic harmony, of 'wa', or harmony achieved through art, art as a harmonizer and itself as a form of harmony, is what Renoir's son, Jean Renoir, in essence described in his biography of his father, which provides as good of an explanation of that Eastern conception as any:

> "The world of Renoir is a single entity. The red of the poppy determines the pose of the young man with the umbrella. The blue of the sky harmonizes with the sheepskin the young shepherd wears. His pictures are demonstrations of an overall unity." (1962: 221-222)

And if so, so too the fan and vase—surely as the red poppy or sheepskin—must be a vital element of his painting, not merely frill or frosting.

> "The backgrounds are as important as the foregrounds. It is not flowers, faces, mountains, which are put in juxtaposition to each other: it is an ensemble of elements which go to make one central theme, and they are bound together by a feeling of love which unites the differences between them." (1962: 222)

How similar to the way Japanese art was seen from Japoniste contemporaries of Renoir! As Alfred Stevens asserted: "In Japanese art all is love, from the blade of grass to the divinity." (CIV., *Impressions on Painting*, 1886: 22) Sounding like an explication of Zen painting and the Upanishads of India in one, Jean Renoir continues with what he understood as his father's philosophy of art:

> "When one evokes Renoir, one always comes back to that vital point. *In his world mind is liberated from matter, not by ignoring it but by penetrating it*. The blossom of the linden-tree and the bee sipping the honey from it follow the same rhythm as the blood circulating under the skin of the young girl sitting on the grass. This is also the current in which the symbolic cork is carried along. The world is one. The linden, the bees, the young girl, the light and *Renoir are all part of the same thing, and of equal importance*. And the same holds true of the seas, the cities, the eagle soaring above the mountains, the miner deep in the mine, Aline Charigot feeding her little son Pierre at her breast. *In this compact whole each of our gestures, each of our thoughts, has its repercussions.*" (1962: 222, *italics* added)

Compare this to an explication of Zen painting ('zenga') by Awakawa Yasuichi, who was an unusual combination of economist and philosopher of art, lecture touring Europe in 1962 on this subject at the invitation of various museums, in an age we referred to as a 'Japonisme Renaissance'. We shall quote Awakawa's *Zen Painting* (trans. J. Bester, 1970) at some length because, surprisingly, it aptly describes and deepens Jean Renoir's portrayal of his father. According to Awakawa, the philosophical instinct for expression, to convey a view of life, to find meaning by contemplating the world on the one hand, and the "desire for pleasure, to experience beauty" on the other, might be considered two pursuits at variance with each other, but in fact "the active expression of a view of life results in fulfillment and pleasure, ...heightened to the degree one partakes of and expresses truth." Awakawa continues his explication in terms of the artist experience:

> This 'contemplation' entails, of course, an act of selection in terms of a particular work of art—taking a particular scene or aspect of human life as it unfolds before one and empathizing—knowing, understanding, feeling it as a part of one's own experience. The Japanese word *kansho* translated here as 'contemplation' means to 'turn a Zen light on things', to become one with nature, and is part of the process of personal development toward full insight. The important thing here is that the content, style, and subject matter of a painting are decided by the artist's own view of life; Zenga in this sense is unique." (1970: 30, *italics* original)

The difficult to pinpoint 'je ne sais quoi' appeal of Renoir's paintings lies in his 'turning of a Renoiresque light on things'—his content, style, and subject matter decided by his view of life, his unique contemplation of the world. In the above commentary, and when we encounter them in the following passages again, if we substitute in our own minds the words *zenga* with the phrase *authentic art/s*, and *Zen* (or Zen ideas) with either *True/Truth*, we can overcome the mental obstacle of religious identifications and any abstruse esotericism that might be associated with it—since, after all, the attainment of the plain and profound truth must be counted among the ultimate aims of Zen.

> "It is from this contemplation and expression that the extreme pleasure afforded by art derives a pleasure that results from the pursuit of, and experiencing of reality. Thus 'artistic' in this context may mean more or less the same as religious; *when an artist produces a work, his awareness expands in every direction and is amplified, assimilating the vast and profound truth of life* in a way impossible in ordinary, everyday activity. (1970: 30, *italics* added)

Let us take only one further step into abstraction, as this process of attaining unity through artistic expression is perhaps what one of Japan's most highly regarded philosophers, Nishida Kitaro, meant by 'Zettai mujun-teki jiko-doitsu' (絶対矛盾的自己同一) or 'Self-Identity in Absolute Contradiction' as Harmony (in *The Problem of Japanese Culture*, 1940), where the undeniable existence of contradiction between separate individuals and the world is simultaneously transcended in a continued state of contradiction (without a Hegelian style synthesis) by self-expression towards a fuller self-realization, becoming harmony. We shall limit our metaphysical arguments to that, though it is worthwhile to point out in passing such philosophical issues are not irrelevant to our understanding of 'Wa' as it relates to our discussion of Renoir's intuitive, sometimes inchoate sentiments about art.

And while Renoir might not have adhered to religious dogma, he did seem to regard his work as a kind of religious activity. There is much that seems to function as religious consolation and truth seeking in his painting. He left behind in his notebooks comments critical of superstitious practices in established religion, saying: "Don't believe a word of it." (in J. Renoir, 1962: 218) Then for Renoir, where is true religion to be found? He answers in his following sentence:

> "Religion is everywhere. It is in the mind, in the heart, in the love you put into what you do." (Ibid.)

Or, as Awakawa explains: "The act of artistic expression thus becomes a statement of the universal, and as such is an act of worship in the deepest sense. It is a characteristic of art that the contemplation of life that is its prime objective also carries with it the elevation and joy of a profound religious experience—the joy that arises with the growth of truth in the mind of the artist." (1970: 30) Here art "for the sake of the self" and art "for the sake of an ideal" fuse together to become "art expressing the universal" according to Awakawa:

> "Zenga are an ideal example of this creative process. As an individual artist's expression of Zen experience, they are at once statements of a view of life and didactic tools, are aesthetic objects and the manifestation of universal principles. Subject, content and form all interact and form an indivisible whole." (1970: 31)

Putting aside the idea of art as a didactic tool, the above is fundamentally what Jean Renoir described in different words—in Japanese 'gazen ichimi'—painting and Zen are one. The ideal of harmony goes hand in hand with the unity of all things, which also implies a deep satisfaction in one's being for what it is—as it is. For Auguste Renoir, human comprehension is not limited, but rather:

> "it is what it has to be, otherwise cats or birds would be even more limited than we are in this regard, which is wrong, since nothing on earth is limited." (*Grammar* paragraph 56, in Herbert, 2000: 134)

And that

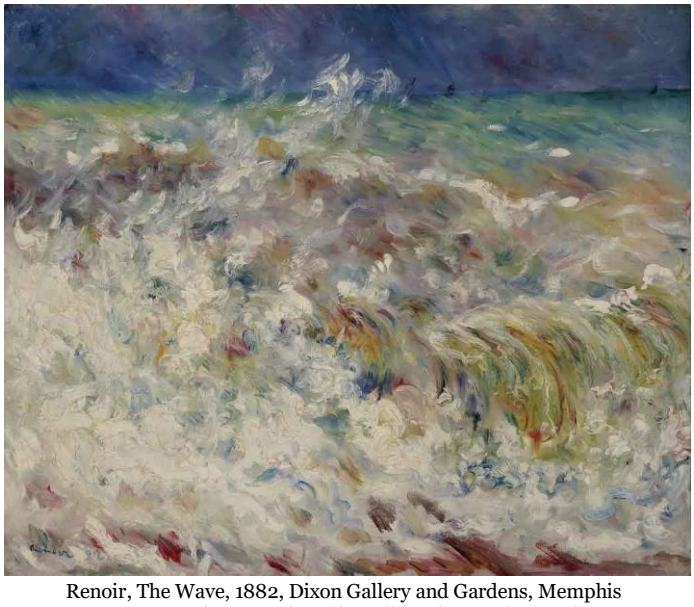
> "It is so easy to keep to one's place as a human, admiring and enjoying all these beautiful things, without trying to understand anything. Why not bow down and say frankly: I don't understand anything, and if I don't understand anything, it's because I'm not supposed to understand, because my role is sufficient." (*Grammar* paragraph 58, in Herbert, 2000: 134).

Perhaps nothing better conveys the thought 'Taru wo shiru', found in countless traditional Japanese gardens. Engraved as a motto on stone water basins in the form "吾唯知足" (ware tada taru wo shiru) to gently encourage the notion of sufficiency as already given, it is a frame of mind which should not be so hard to see is tied to a working harmony of society within nature. That, and Awakawa's following synopsis of Zen as it evolved in Japan, is a remarkably fitting description of Renoir's outlook on spirituality and art—precisely this mix of worldliness, practicality, religious feeling, down-to-earthiness, and an artistic transcendentalism, all in one.

> "The chief characteristic of Zen philosophy as seen in Japan is its combination of this type of Chinese worldliness and practicality with Buddhist transcendentalism. *It seeks its ideals, as it were, in actuality.* In line with this, the purpose of painting Zenga is, in a sense, to express at least one aspect of Zen philosophy in a form that is extremely easy for the ordinary person to understand. The true Zenga, this means, is firmly down-to-earth yet at the same time imbued with the profoundest Zen ideas." (1970: 18, *italics* added)

When we think of what some of those tenets are—that Truth lies beyond logic and verbal expression; that "the stimuli to enlightenment lies about us all the time if one only has the eyes to see them"; that systems and rituals are not the means to Truth; that contemplation is vital to achieve it—we realize Renoir had similar underlying beliefs, if not as a professed religion.

"They [the Japanese] have even captured the foam that the sea makes atop its waves"—Auguste Renoir, *Grammar*



Renoir, The Wave, 1882, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis
Image Google Art Project (tint adjusted towards actual)

Hokusai, Wave (七日夜), c. 1st half of 19th cent., MET
H. O. Havemeyer Collection, JP1863

Renoir's ideas were formed from his own personal experience that included the observation of Japanese art; but were also encouraged by the intellectual currents of the time. In fact there are parallels between his beliefs and the opinions of a variety of Japan enthusiasts of the age such as Philippe Burty, who coined the term 'Japonisme', and whose correspondence with Renoir we touched upon briefly—a closer acquaintance of Renoir's than is generally appreciated. And then there was Zacharie Astruc, who saw Japan as possessed with a singular aesthetic sensibility unlike any other—distinct from Asia and Europe. Or from the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain: the artist Edward Burne-Jones, who, though depicting medieval scenes, was much inspired by the example of Japan; and William Morris, while not openly an admirer of Japanese art, reveals much in common with katagami stencil patterns in his fabric designs, as demonstrated in the meticulously arranged exhibition catalogue, *Katagami Style* (2012). Herbert, in his thorough examination of Renoir's writings, found the following theme underlying much of it, beliefs shared in good part with these contemporary thinkers, that ideal of Man in unconscious harmony with nature and society, but also possessed of self-awareness:

> "Medieval Europe and other societies vaguely called "barbarian" had a wholeness, Renoir thought, that could not be found in his own day in France. For a contemporary society that could be admired, he named only Japan. Like his client and friendly critic Theodore Duret, and like van Gogh, he believed that Japanese craftsmen, matching those of earlier Europe, were integrated into their society. They were not tainted by modern cities, and instead enjoyed 'this simple existence that allows them time to go out, to contemplate.' In France the simple life that Renoir envisioned for Japanese artists had been destroyed, he believed, by the secular materialism of the nineteenth century." (*Nature's Workshop*, Herbert, 2000: 15)

In the words of Renoir himself:

> "With the modern way of working in France, man is nothing more than a machine. His brain, unstimulated, is falling asleep. The Japanese way is completely the opposite." (*Grammar* paragraph 70, in Herbert, 2000: 136-137)

These overarching notions were close to his heart—ideas of French vs. Japanese culture, past vs. present, nature vs. art—where every Japanese art and craft provided insights into methodology, perception, and thought processes. These were not specific forms to imitate he asserted, though, as we have come across repeatedly, he most likely borrowed directly from those sources as well. But even so, most importantly, it is at the level of his underlying premises and defining concepts where a connection exists between Renoir and Japan, one that shaped his outlook on art, nature, and his own sense of cultural identity.

Renoir follows the lead of Émile Zola, quite faithfully in certain respects, in his opinions when voiced to others, concerning Japan, which was not to slavishly imitate it but to find a way with it true to their native conditions and life. Zola, after praising Japanese art for its liberating effect from the viscous drag of the 'school of bitumen' (the preceding ossified art traditions) with its simplicity of methods, vibrant colors, and intensity of sensory impact, continues to say that is not all:

> "And I have not spoken of the exquisite art of the Japanese in its detail, of their drawing so true and so refined, of all that naturalist fancy which stems from direct observation down to its strangest deviations. I will add, however, that while the influence of Japonisme was excellent in pulling us out of a tradition of bitumen and making us see nature's bright gaieties, a deliberate imitation of an art that belongs neither to our race nor to our environment would end up becoming nothing more than an unbearable fashion. Japonisme has its merits, but it must not be plastered everywhere; otherwise, art would turn into mere bric-à-brac. (É. Zola, *Le Bon combat*, ed. by J.-P. Bouillon, 1974: 214)

How similar to what we have already heard Renoir say. Not vocal at the Café Guerbois, he was that much more an attentive listener. And yet this defining of his identity, formulated out of an opposition to a distinct and particular Other, is in a certain sense also a contribution of Japonisme. We quoted him briefly before; let us hear him out at greater length:

> "More and more Japan is invading not only France but Europe and America; as a result, decline in French ceramics. Copying Japanese art in order to do it less well would be an error and nothing would be gained. What's necessary is to turn our attention to it in order to emulate it, but certainly not do any copying. You need to go and see beautiful Japanese things and ask yourself why they are beautiful. Use the same means to do everything else." (*Grammar* paragraph 23, in Herbert, 2000: 126-127)

If anything, however, one senses Renoir the artist is more captivated than Zola the writer by Japanese art. For he clearly states his unqualified esteem of Japanese art as beautiful and definitely worthy of emulation, arguing only mindless duplication was to be avoided. It was probably because of this admonition, proclaimed by Zola, and averred by Renoir himself, that when his compositions closely approached Japanese models, he was reticent about admitting what was in fact a powerful influence.

Let us look at those conceptual links between Japanese aesthetics, the ideas of Renoir's contemporaries, and Renoir's personal sentiments in greater depth. Throughout the section 'From Auguste Renoir's Notebook' in *Renoir, My Father* by his son Jean, are ideas most often associated with the basic precepts of japonisme—such as asymmetry, which Renoir calls irregularity, and which is perhaps a more apt description of Japanese art, since it was not really asymmetry as opposed to symmetry that was to be found in Japanese images but the more vivid conveyance of the irregularities of nature and spatial reality. A leaf part eaten by insects, or part shriveled and part fresh, sprouting in unpredictable directions—this was more than just the difference between symmetry and asymmetry. Or women heavy or thin, who are squatting or cutting their nails or cleaning their ears in the most awkward positions in compositions that center or 'de-center' the subject—either is fine, and asymmetry itself is not necessarily categorically superior even in Japanese art.

Renoir understood and assimilated this in his own way, writing in his notebook:

> "Everything that I call grammar or primary notions of Art can be summed up in one word: Irregularity. ... Take the leaf of a tree: take a hundred thousand other leaves of the same kind of tree: not one will exactly resemble another. ... Explain the irregularity in regularity. The value of regularity is in the eye only ... the non-value to the regularity of the compass." (in J. Renoir, 1962: 240-241)

A hundred thousand leaves, says Renoir; the *Manyoshu* means a *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves,* ten thousand poems none like the other. The imagery and metaphors Renoir uses echo those of Japanese poetry, a sensitivity to small things, to the individuality of detail and its artistic meaning. Renoir spoke and wrote of this idea many times, though transformed for brush from verse, and often concluded it with the example of Japan, in his manuscript on the principles of art, *Grammar*. Sometimes he knows only that he wishes to include the example of Japan but has not decided how; at the end of his initial declaration of the idea of irregularity he wrote: "I hereby end the first part. I would like to add something referring to Japanese art, but without embarrassment." (paragraph 14, in Herbert, 2000: 124) —Meaning probably without embarrassment to himself, in terms of lack of expertise regarding Japan, or perhaps from appearing over enthusiastic about the country. Here is an example from later in the manuscript:

> "When you go for a walk in the country you see that the trees, even though planted together, don't have the same shape or the same thickness. Pull all the leaves off a tree and lay them on top of one another, you'll see that, were there millions of them, you wouldn't find a single one with exactly the same shape or the same color. You enjoy this [painted] avenue: but change it, add some regularized trees, with leaves modeled after one another, you'll sense the wearisomeness of the monotony and you'll quickly take refuge in the arms of nature. You'll be content with the infinite riches she gives you, without wanting to correct her. *That's why Japanese cups are pretty and ours ugly*." (paragraph 69, in Herbert, 2000: 136, *italics* added)

And perhaps the countless ukiyo-e bijin ('beauties'), which conveyed an image so contrary to the Greek ideal in almost every respect of physical and cultural composition—whether physiognomy and expression, pose or gesture, clothing and color—made it all very clear to Renoir:

> "It is customary to prostrate oneself in front of the (obvious) beauty of Greek art. The rest has no value. What a farce! It is as if you told me that a blonde is more beautiful than a brunette; and vice versa."
>
> (in J. Renoir, 1962: 241)

This too echoes Zola, who, speaking of epic Greek art, pronounced the following verdict:

> "Such an art cannot return, since the civilization that produced it is dead. Let our sculptors tell themselves this every morning. Only a heroic age, ... —could give birth to this race of solemn and serene statues, to these gods who are merely magnified men, to these cold, hieratic images in which the pursuit of absolute beauty has killed life." ('La sculpture' in J.-P. Bouillon ed., 1974: 122-123)

In Zola's opinion, in his day and age, such an ideal was "a lie":

> "This is to say that sculpture, as Greece understood it, has become a dead language to us—an artistic expression that we can no longer employ naturally. Our artists speak the language of Greek art the way sixth-graders speak Latin: thumbing through dictionaries, lacking an authentic accent, riddled with dreadful barbarisms." (1974: 123)

Zola concluded it was a "stupid [bête] idealization of nature in face of contemporary truths" that "seems childish, a grotesque and petty recalcitrance." (1974: 123) Japanese art gave Renoir a wider, more varied aesthetic landscape to survey, exposing further the relative nature of cultural ideals, quietly seeping into his formulation of beauty and therefore art—as we have repeatedly witnessed. Might it not be Renoir then, who better grasped the lessons of that Eastern tradition, more so than many of his contemporary well-known Japonistes?

Kitagawa Utamaro, c. 1799
Yamauba et Kintaro avec un jouet
Monet collection title, Musée Giverny
Image Wikimedia Commons

Auguste Renoir, c. 1886
Laundress and Her Child (Aline and Pierre)
The Cleveland Museum of Art

Mary Cassatt, c. 1897
A Kiss for Baby Anne
Private collection
Image Wikart

This brings our attention to a related aspect of Renoir's thinking which reminds one of what Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzo) called "Japan's worship of the imperfect" as the grounding principle of the Way of Tea (*The Book of Tea*, 1906: 3). For Renoir however, rather than rustic tea bowls with irregularly undulating surfaces, he expressed it in his female nudes and portraits characterized by unpretentious faces with irregular eyes and unidealized corporeal forms. Take any summary of Japanese arts, and you may find something like the following included: "Among these diverse aesthetic phenomena and pursuits, one theme stands out for being somewhat unusual, yet is generally identified as forming a quintessentially Japanese taste. It is the celebration of those qualities commonly regarded as falling short of, or deteriorating from, the optimal condition of the object." (Y. Saito, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55, 4, 1997) At the same time it was being lauded for its exquisite perfectionism, Japan was also a treasure trove of images that justified and sharpened his thinking of 'imperfect but beautiful', or rather 'imperfect *as* beautiful'—whether asymmetrical, inelegant, vulgar, disheveled—something which may be said to apply at one level or another to all the Impressionists.

Exemplarity, Singularity, and Necessity

Elsewhere Renoir is more explicit about Japan. In his notebook, as recorded by his son Jean, he declares that "Young people should learn to see things for themselves, and not ask for advice", and that they should instead:

> "Look at the way the Japanese painted birds and fish. Their system is quite simple. They sat down in the countryside and watched birds flying. By watching them carefully, they finally came to understand movement; and they did the same as regards fish." (in J. Renoir, 1962: 243)

Kuroda Toko (黒田稲皐), 1830-47
Painting, hanging scroll. School of carp. Ink and colour and gold on silk.
© The Trustees of the British Museum (publ. in *The Pictorial Arts of Japan*, 1886)

Mori Sosen (Attrib. 森狙仙), late 18th-early 19th cent.
Painting, hanging scroll. Twenty studies of the facial expressions of macaques.
© The Trustees of the British Museum

This echoes the Goncourts who wrote in their invaluable record of the times, *Journal*:

> "Chinese art, and particularly Japanese art, those arts which appear so incredibly fantastic to bourgeois eyes, are drawn direct from nature. Everything that they do is taken from observation. They represent what they see: the incredible effects of the sky, the stripes on a mushroom, the transparency of the jellyfish." (30 September 1864, in C. Harrison and P. Wood, eds., 1998: 418)

So what is the footing and foundation of an artist? "An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature." An artist's "tools" are not important. It is observation of Nature 'as is' which counts, as he explains by the following:

> "The Japanese still have a simplicity of life which gives them time to go about and to contemplate. They still look, fascinated, at a blade of grass, or the flight of birds, or the wonderful movements of fish, and they go home, their minds filled with beautiful ideas, which they have no trouble in putting on the objects they decorate." (in J. Renoir, 1962: 243)

The existence of the decorative arts, including ceramics, loomed large in his imagination, and the lessons of Japan were never far from those conceptions. Renoir wrote:

> "Everyone has written about ceramics, architecture, art in general. It has been stated that such and such a thing was beautiful, that this other thing was less so, but no one I think has given the real reason that makes for beauty or ugliness. We're going to try to identify this thing together. Let's consider a few Japanese cups with the same design and some French cups with the same design as well. The Japanese cups will be beautiful and ours inferior, and I say that without even seeing them. (I'm speaking naturally about modern ones.) It's because Japanese cups are made with hand and eye and perceptiveness whereas French ones are made merely by a clever worker who has nothing except his skill, more harmful than useful in this case." (G*rammar* paragraph 25, in Herbert, 2000: 127)

Renoir believed the Japanese artisan's attitude was one of art as a fluid process rather than routine focused, and not obsessed with a predetermined result in mind, excessively conscious of effects to be achieved. Superior artistry was a state of mind, not a fixed technical skill. Renoir proceeds to explain in detail:

> "Let's consider how the Japanese artist must proceed at first. He wants to make a simple sowing of flowerets. He has seen these flowers, saturated himself with them, seen them according to his temperament and wants to render them as such. He prepares his palette and sketches lightly, without using a compass certainly, and scatters these flowers on this cup, arranges them to his taste and pleased with the effect produced, gets ready to make a second one. But whether the flowers as conceived were too small or crowded too closely together, he feels obliged to add one or two more. The third, and so on. It happens occasionally that an open space a bit too big in his initial plan forces him to add a little leaf or a twig that isn't found on the other cups. Such work activates the mind and, after a few years of work, you see yourself what this man can produce. Because you know that he never agrees to redoing identically the same things." (*Grammar* paragraph 26, in Herbert, 2000: 127)

Japan was unique in that sense; Renoir was not talking about the 'Orient' or 'Asia', nor even China, but specifically Japan. His is not to be confused with an 'Orientalism' or 'Chinoiserie'. This was something that echoed Burty, the Goncourts, and Bracquemond, but especially Zacharie Astruc. "The originality he vainly seeks in China he finds in Japan" Jacques Dufwa says of Astruc—who called upon Europeans for "a creative spirit and immediacy like that of the Japanese" (*Winds from the East*, 1981: 46); Dufwa quotes Astruc directly: "Le Japonais est profondément artiste;—c'est un don de création." (Ibid.) Europe, on the other hand, has slowly lost its love of gardens, the pleasure of colorful clothing, of "silks laughing in the light" (des soies riantes dans la lumière—quoting Astruc, Ibid.) Pleasure in these things is sacrificed to inventions, but not the Japanese, from whom some French artists "have already gained strength from contemplative study" (Dufwa summarizing Astruc); and then in the words of Astruc himself: "They show nature with its boundless settings and its thousand surprises." (Ils montrent la nature avec ses cadres infinis, ses mille surprises.—Ibid.)

For Renoir, during the peak of his powers, Japan, it seems, stood even above that ultimate training ground for all serious European artists until the end of the 19th century—Italy. For instance, while some art historians have assumed Renoir became acquainted with the medieval painter Cennino Cennini's treatise on art, *Il Libro dell'Arte,* from the early 1880s—this again based on Vollard, whose dates for Renoir's supposed acquisition of the book seem unlikely (Herbert, 2000: 42, footnote)—for which he was to write a preface in 1910, Herbert documents "his [Renoir's] manuscripts of 1882-84 do not have the slightest hint of Cennini and it was Japan, not Italy, that he compared with France." (2000: 42) Renoir describes this artistic exceptionalism in the following passage in his *Grammar*:

> "The Japanese for the time being, or up until now, are the only people to have remained within the sound tradition provided by nature. I don't know this artistic people well enough to tell you the true reason for this. What's certain is that they're the only people to take the time to find pleasure from their eyes. They still have the simplicity of the great races. They go and see how birds fly, how fish swim, and have even captured the foam that the sea makes atop its waves, in order to fix them in bronze, on porcelain, and add them even to their unmatched embroidery." (*Grammar* paragraph 156, in Herbert, 2000: 152)

It should be apparent from even these limited examples how much Renoir looked to Japan as embodying artistic ideals and the artist's proper approach to art. And furthermore, for Renoir, that Japanese decorative sensibilities, which we have called 'kogei aesthetics'—where distinctions between arts and crafts are transcended, where the decorative and poetic become one—were an enduring source of inspiration. We postulated two streams of influence there, one represented by the aesthetic qualities of crafts such as ceramics and textiles, and the other by fans and parasols; these united to form one tributary, which in turn united with that of more purely graphic arts such as ukiyo-e prints, ehon picture books, and painting. Parallel to this tangible stimulus was the equally wide, intangible flow of ideas discussed above, covering art, nature, reality, identity, and artistic perception (which, if expressed in one word, is 'Wa', harmony of the richest kind)—all this would have coalesced into a forceful imaginative undercurrent shaping Renoir's creations. If so, it may be said that Renoir was indeed very much immersed in Japonisme, in the sense Philippe Burty defined it:

> "as the study of the art and genius of Japan."

It must be made clear that the present study does not argue Japan was Renoir's sole source—his art clearly draws upon multiple traditions, including the Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-classical; from artists such as Titian, Rubens, Velázquez, Veronese, Watteau, Boucher, Ingres, Delacroix, and Corot, among others. Rather, it contends that 'Japonisme' has hardly had a chance to be whispered next to Renoir's name (like a secret perhaps, he kept close to his heart). The role of Japanese art in the development of his distinctive color, luminosity, texture, and decorative harmony has scarcely been addressed; compositional devices such as asymmetry, flattened pictorial space, and bold cropping, as well as thematic material including landscape forms, figural poses, and art objects from Japan have been downplayed as props or dismissed as coincidental. But by examining specific visual correspondences of a compelling nature, alongside textual and biographical material, a broad convergence of evidence emerges into view—achieving hopefully a more balanced, multifaceted understanding of Renoir, and shedding light on the creative process itself by which artworks come into being.

On both sides of the Pacific there appears to be a misguided idea among some that Japanese influence takes away from Renoir's artistic merit—it does not; rather it provides a picture of greater complexity, of a more cosmopolitan artist than naysayers give him credit for. They do him a disservice—and their readers. As to his sources, the European current might appear wider, and the Japanese narrower—but swifter—a make or break contributor to the success of many of his more original pieces, and which helps to account for that sense of richness one receives from those works. To put it in the terminology of logic, the current of the West, formed primarily by French and Italian art, while obviously necessary, is not by itself always a sufficient explanation for his most original compositions; and that of the East, formed of craft and graphic arts, is not a sufficient but nonetheless a necessary cause for the unique character of certain paintings of his that have elevated them to the level of iconic masterpieces.

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Appendix

Motifs in 'Madam Monet and her Son Jean in the Garden at Argenteuil'

Left: Utagawa Kunisada, actor print, 'Onoe Kikugoro as Ronin Matagoro' (1823, The Japonisme Museum, Kyoto). Note the fan design, a predecessor of the kind Madame Monet holds in Renoir's painting. Usually the upper swath is pink to light red, the middle white, and the lower swath blue, green, or yellow. And of course the fan Camille Monet holds is the same as that in the celebrated 'La Japonaise' (1876, MFA Boston, with its 'mikazuki' crescent in the red swath). Though undoubtably favored because it coincides with the tricolor, many observers, without any idea that Japanese fans came in those colors and in that pattern, believe it is of French make, just as they would, were the painter a modern day American or Russian artist painting his wife, be led to a similar conclusion that it was of patriotic manufacture.

Right: Auguste Renoir, 'Madam Monet and her Son Jean in the Garden at Argenteuil' (1874, National Gallery of Art, DC). This painting was discussed mostly in relation to Utamaro's compositional methods, but as can be seen here, specific motifs could also have been borrowed. While domestic fowl seem to have been actually kept in the Argenteuil garden, the prominence given to the cock might also be a quiet reference to Japanese rooster 'portraits' found across a variety of sources from Hokusai's manga and Utamaro prints (e.g. 'Rabbit and Rooster' from the series *Ukiyo Nanatsume awase*, c. late 1790s-1801) to paintings by Ito Jakuchu. That portraiture at times bestowed no less a dignity to their subjects than to fellow human beings—as the rooster was one of the twelve zodiac animals—in contrast to most Western portrayals of barn-house fowl. Manet's version of this scene, painted at the same time, depicts them as such. Renoir's creature seems out of place; it stands almost floating, immobile, as if lifted from a kakemono or the gold ground of a byobu as depicted, for instance, in Utamaro's aforesaid print. Once again, Renoir's painting appears more japonisant than his fellow Impressionists; in this case Manet—that esteemed friend of Renoir and Monet—and included in any survey of Japonisme as representative of the movement.

Lower right: Katsushika Hokusai, Detail from *Manga*, Vol. 1 (1814, reprint 1868, Brigham Young University, Provo). The image that is considered to have captivated Impressionist painters such as Manet and Cassatt may have played a role in Renoir's imagery of the boy Jean, slouching back into the fabric of his mother's dress (see National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, ed., *Hokusai and Japonisme,* Yomiuri Shinbun, 2017).

Kunisada, 1823

Renoir, 1874

Hokusai, 1814, reprint 1868

‘Young Girl with a Swan’—images discussed in connection to Renoir’s folding screen

While the photograph of ‘Mme. Renoir, Coco, and Pierre’ (c. 1901-02, in White, 1984: 223) is not available for reproduction, another photo in the public domain is shown below to the right, with probably the same byobu, though mostly draped over with fabrics so only a portion of the screen is visible. An example of this sort of design on a fan in a Utamaro triptych, ‘Fishing at Iwaya, on Enoshima’ (c. 1790) is on the left. In the collection of ‘Livres japonais du baron Charles de Chassiron’ (Musée d’Orbigny-Bernon), there is a book of such crests—the *Hayabiki Moncho*, acquired by the Baron in Edo in 1858, with emblems similar to that in the photos.

Utamaro, Detail of Fishing at Iwaya on Enoshima, c. 1790
Right sheet of the triptych, Cleveland Museum of Art

The family of Auguste Renoir, 73 rue Caulaincourt, Paris, c. 1902-03
Fonds Vollard, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, image Wikimedia Commons

A comparison of multiple photographs, especially ‘Aline, Coco, and Pierre, Le Cannet’ (c. 1902, photographer unknown, in White, 2017, Chapter 5), allow the emblem to be identified as the family crest called ‘kawari itsutsu omodaka’ (変わり五つ沢瀉) shown below, seemingly all of this same kind on Renoir’s screen. The design, formed by an arrangement of five of the tripartite shaped leaves of a water plantain of the Alismataceae family, resemble arrowheads, and were thus associated with military victory and hence used by certain samurai clans.

Kawari itsutsu omodaka (変わり五つ沢瀉)
Dark/light inverted on Renoir’s screen, as common when applied to dark dyed textiles and other craft surfaces.

More on the vertical stripe as fashion in relation to 'La Loge'

The bold, wide stripe in kimono design was, it is hypothesized in Japan, originally introduced from other parts of Asia anywhere from India to China, through trade with visiting foreigners, Asian or European, in the late 16th century, possibly earlier. This is inferred mainly from remaining treasured foreign fabrics known as 'meibutsugire' (名物裂), of which the importation of the striped 'kanto' (間道), such as those from southern China, have been postulated as the start of the fashion. Though in fact, long multicolored vertically striped skirts are found in the Takamatsu-zuka kofun (c. late 7th century) tomb chamber wall painting (西壁女子群像) in Asuka, and vertical fabric fragments (in combination with other designs) and are preserved in the 8th century Shosoin storehouse in Nara, so the first introduction of the vertical stripe may have been much earlier. And though not as clothing, drapes (幕) in bold and colorful vertical stripes were commonly used as screens to divide floor space in the Heian period, as depicted in emaki (picture scrolls), such as the Tokiwa Mitsunaga attributed 'Nenju gyoji emaki' from the 12th century. A variety of historical possibilities exist regarding this matter, and there is no way to definitively prove things one way or another due to a dearth of written and visual documentation pertaining its provenance in Japan.

But if they were popular among visiting Europeans enough to make an impression upon the welcoming Japanese, one would expect to find them portrayed in 'Nanban' paintings (c. 1590-17th century) of those visitors, but we find few instances there to back up such a claim. Horizontal lines appear on trousers, and a few vertical ones may be located, but in both instances noticeably on what are portrayed as dark-skinned servants holding parasols for light-skinned personages, or otherwise following behind them in attendance. And already, slightly earlier, in the national treasure designated 'Kanpu-zu byobu' (観楓図屏風, Tokyo National Museum) by Kano Hideyori (before 1519-c. 1576), there is a woman who wears widely separated vertical stripes of combined red and yellow lines, unlike anything found in European depictions.

Given the appearance of a variety of Japanese motifs in French fashions during the Rococo period, where already for a century the wearing of kimonos had become widespread among the well-to-do in Europe and even appear in the Americas, attested to by numerous portraits and documentation from the late 17th and 18th centuries, we must examine the relation between vertical stripes and the japonaiserie vogue in that era, usually lumped together with Chinese influence under the rubric of 'chinoiserie'.

Certain distinctions must be clarified beforehand: it is the *fashionableness* of *vertical* stripes in 18th century to the late 19th century in France that is the focus of discussion, and this needs to be emphasized as horizontal stripes are found in both Europe and Japan from medieval times, and vertical stripes have existed in the West in more recent centuries as a mark of servitude or criminality. What is to be investigated here is the presence of vertical, full or near full length stripes displayed on European outer garments of higher society and on imported Japanese garments at the time, as well as the depiction of such garments in other media including porcelain, prints, and picture books that might have been brought into France in the Rococo period or earlier, and then again later in another influx of such items during the second half of the following century.

However, a barrier of disbelief may confront the reader, as even more 'marginalized' in historical surveys than the japonisme of the 19th century is the japonaiserie of the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet it is a well-documented fact that porcelains, lacquerware, and—what concerns us here—kimonos, known by the Dutch word 'Japonse rok' or in English 'banyans', were popular among European elites, both nobility and academicians. So popular were they that official university missives requiring attendees to wear proper European dress and not Japanese attire at Leiden University ceremonies were issued at least once, in 1691 (P. C. Molhuysen, ed., *Sources for the History of Leiden University 1574-1811*, 1913, part IV 1682-1715, p. 87).

On the following page Jacob Gole's 'Young Researcher' (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, object no. RP-P-1906-3199) is after a print by Jean Lepautre (Paris) according to the Rijksmuseum online artwork data, and indeed there is a very similar image of Lepautre's, 'Homme en robe de chambre' (c. 1670-82, British Museum, no. I,7.160) which depicts a kimono derived garment of the same type (though not patterned in stripes), indicating Japanese garments and their designs had arrived in France by the late 17th century. Gole's print is also quite close to Pieter Schenk's doctor 'Ludolphus Smids' in Japonse rok (c. 1670-1713, Rijksmuseum, object no. RP-P-1905-4490, shown center), and it is worth noting that the pose in these prints (including Lepautre's) is very much akin to that in early bijinga prints/paintings by Moronobu and other Japanese artists of the 17th century, exhibiting the distinctive gesture of the 'bijin' (beauty)—slightly lifting up her garment with one hand. This feminine mannerism in men seems slightly strange in these early European prints, and disappears in later masculine imagery but becomes a feature of female portraiture percolating down to Renoir's 'Umbrellas', probably receiving added impetus from the renewed example of Japanese prints, as discussed in the main text of this study.

Jacob Gole, Young Researcher in his Study, c. 1670-87
Wearing "kamerjas of japonse rok"
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Pieter Schenk, Ludolphus Smids, c. 1670-1713
Medical doctor wearing "kamerjas (japonse rok)"
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Ensemble (banyan, waistcoat, and breeches), c. 1750-99
"European", made of silk, wool, linen
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The 'Ensemble' of men's banyans ambiguously identified as of "European" make at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (second half of the 18th century, the striped gown's object number is C.I.56.5.1a–c) shows the Japanese style of wide spacings of darker and thicker lines in two colors of different tones with narrower lines in between. It can be safely asserted that these are the equivalent of Japonse rok, and the main silk outer garment is most likely not of European make. The appellation "European" is rather vague for a museum, and in any case it is much like calling 18th century Imari or Ming vases European because they have been fitted with gilt stands and handles in Europe. In England they simply were renamed 'banyans', which has become the standard translation from the Dutch. For example, at the Rijksmuseum, the English language description of one item "Double Face Banyan, anonymous, c. 1750 - c. 1800" (Object number BK-1978-878) comes with the description: "Wealthy Dutch men began wearing housecoats in the 17th century. They were based on kimonos, and thus called 'Japonse rokken', or Japanese gowns. They became more detailed and were provided with an asymmetrical overlap from the mid-18th century."

Yet in general, the menial and ignoble connotations of the stripe can be seen throughout European painting of the 18th century, where full length stripes are the mark of the fishmonger, the cook, the vegetable seller, servant, knave or the sailor's pants. The deep roots of the stripe's association with low status, baseness, or evil in the West is entertainingly recounted in Michel Pastoureau's *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

Much research has already been conducted on the spread of kimonos in 17th and 18th century Europe. The following are a sampling of accessible articles: 'Why did seventeenth-century Dutch scholars wear Japanese garments?' (19.11.2019, Utrecht University, www.uu.nl/en/bite-of-science); or 'The Fascination with Japanese-styled gowns: A Quantitative Perspective on Ready Made Garments at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century' (Angelina Illes, *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art,* DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2023.15.1.5). Picture books of Japanese textile design had also come to Europe early via Holland in the 17th century, and were admired by prominent men of society such as the Dutch state secretary and poet Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), and Wybe Kuitert's papers on the subject explore the bewilderment and admiration held for them (e.g., 'Japanese robes, sharawadgi, and the landscape discourse of Sir William Temple and Constantijn Huygens', *Garden History* 41, 2, 2013). This topic is covered at length in 'The Kimono in Europe and the New World' in 'Japonaiserie as Concurrent with Chinoiserie During the Age of the Baroque and Rococo' at japonisme.org.

It should be added that the stripe as a flourish for the sleeve, skirt, or front design over the chest, though not as contiguous lines throughout, did exist among the elite in the early 16th century (e.g., 'François I' by Jean Clouet, 1525-30, Louvre), and then again in the 17th century, especially by the use of 'panes' (parallel slits into the fabric which created a striped effect) in the 1620s and 1630s led by the example of Spain, fading with the Thirty Year's War. The thin striped men's waistcoat was common in the 18th century—but in all these cases the stripe was narrow and not the main outer garment, nor worn at any substantial length among the well-to-do until much later. At first glance, it seems a striking exception is to be found in Godfrey Kneller's 'Henrietta Cavendish Holles' (1714, Christ Church, University of Oxford), where the Countess of Oxford sports broad sky blue stripes—though here again, not full length, rather a combination of jacket with vertical stripes and a skirt with a broad horizontal one. The thick, seemingly silk fabric suggests it may have come from a banyan, a variation of the kind on the previous page, and then re-fitted.

Kneller, Henrietta Cavendish Holles, Countess of Oxford, 1714
Christ Church, University of Oxford

Moronobu, Beni-e of Young Woman Dancing, 1683
From an untitled album © The Trustees of the British Museum

In Japan, for samurai men, we find the wearing of stripes, sometimes a combination of the vertical and horizontal, or that would appear so when worn, in the prints of Hishikawa Moronobu from the late 17th century, as in 'Woodblock print with hand-colouring', of 'Cherry viewing parties' from *Edo mono mairi no tei* (Sightseeing in Edo, c. 1680, British Museum), though somewhat hidden by the tucked up skirt-like hakama. For women during the same period, it appears as a full-length vertical stripe in a scene of leisurely musical entertainment, 'Woodblock print, beni-e. Woman dancing while a young man plays the samisen and an older woman reclines behind him' (1683, British Museum), shown above to the right. This is clearly an early depiction of the full length vertical stripe as fashionable wear among women in a woodblock print.

But even earlier, such as in the folding screen depicting the 1626 gala Imperial procession of Emperor Go-mizuno and family members to Nijojo Castle in Kyoto to be received there by the Tokugawa shogun, 'Nijojo gyoko-zu byobu' (c. 1626-1644, Sen-oku-hakukokan Museum, Kyoto), there are men and women in brilliantly colored, wide vertical stripes among the spectators in the seating areas on the sidelines. The procession itself, comprised of aristocratic and samurai elements, is extremely detailed, and considered to be rendered with a high degree of historical accuracy (confirmed by available documents surrounding the event). The artist, though unknown, was probably of an illustrious lineage (正系) of Yamato-e artists, and the work was likely undertaken while still relatively fresh in his memory, during the Kanei period (1624-1644), according to the museum publication on the piece (*Nijojo gyoko-zu byobu no sekai*, 2014: 77).

Where we find a true abundance of the bold vertical stripe in art is in early 18th century ukiyo-e, but this may be primarily due to prints becoming more numerous, and thus ipso facto the design more frequently recorded. In any case it is clear vertical stripes as a favored design had spread to all classes, both sexes, to the young and old without the heavy stigma attached to it in the West. That they were considered fashionable wear is demonstrated by their depiction in actor prints, as that by Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764) shown below, which functioned then like today's posters of actor-idols, well before stripes were 'à la mode' in France in the second half of the 18th and 19th centuries. A few prints of the 'uki-e' (浮絵, or large indoor scene done with one-point perspective, not to be confused with 'ukiyo-e') genre are provided from the same time period, in varying social contexts, where the pervasiveness of the fashion can be confirmed, and in none is the stripe meant to be demeaning.

Shown on the following page to the right is a thronging crowd of men entering the Pleasure District, where the vertically striped fellow is a samurai (the scabbard ends of his and his friend's jut out just barely). Another fellow to the left has horizontal stripes, but as was mentioned, horizontal ones are not the issue, though it does indicate the broad appeal of stripes in Japan among the samurai class. Again, vertically lined overcoats would only appear as popular gentlemanly wear in late 18th century France with the Revolution, though the stripes are in general thinner and narrowly spaced, of which Robespierre's portrait (c. 1790, Musée Carnavalet—Histoire de Paris) is a perfect example.

One aspect of the Edo period most fail to realize is the affordability and incredible diversity of fashions, and a shared awareness of stylishness among all classes, part of that general 'aestheticization' of Japanese society remarked upon by many visitors to Japan in the 19th century. And it is not hard to understand why the vertical stripe never went totally out of style for men and women in Japan over the centuries, and was considered 'iki' (粋, dashingly chic, possessing verve)—as long as people wore kimonos—for they suit the cut of Japanese dress allowing the uninterrupted display of the long lines on sleeve and body.

Okumura Masanobu, c. 1723
The Style of a Dependent in Honcho
Actor Yamatogawa Tominosuke, MFA

Tanaka Masunobu, Naka-no-cho in the Yoshiwara, 1740s
(Yoshiwara Naka-no-cho), MFA

What follows is a theater scene with samurai and commoner women with striped garments; and a scene of shopping where young sales clerks, customers, and others whose identity is unclear (for instance the sleepy fellow sitting behind and beyond the lady sitting upfront) are wearing vertical stripes in an establishment which would become one of the best-known department stores in Japan centuries later—Mitsukoshi. Note that another sales clerk wears a garment of different design—i.e., this was not a uniform, but an individual preference. In the works of other print artists of the day, such as those of the Torii school, one can find similar scenes populated with the vertical line. Thus it is clear that by the early 18th century the wearing of full length stripes was an individual choice, open to all, before it became so in Europe.

Okumura Masanobu, Large Perspective View of the Interior of Echigo-ya in Suruga-cho, 1745
(Suruga-cho Echigoya gofukuten o-ukie), MFA Boston

We might then hypothesize that the broad vertical full-length stripe became fashionable wear in France during the tail-end of the Rococo chinoiserie/japonaiserie vogue, continuing into the Empire, and then with a slight lull, becoming even more à la mode with the renewed import of Japanese textiles and their ubiquitous appearance in ukiyo-e prints and picture books in the second half of the 19th century.

Imari porcelain styles pertaining to Renoir's 'Still Life with Bouquet'

Certain authors assume the vase in Renoir's 'Still Life with Bouquet' is Chinese (e.g., Néret, 2026). But at least in general appearance, the vase is typically Imari with a 'Nanban' ('Southern Barbarian' i.e., European) motif. It is possible that it might be a European imitation of which the earliest were Dutch Delft, such as those made at the 'Greek A' factory, where replicas using the signature mark of Imari were produced to meet the demand for Imari across Europe, just as kimono-like garments or folding screens imitative of those from Japan and China were manufactured on the Coromandel coast of southeast India for that purpose. Or it might be Qing—'Chinese Imari' that was made, like the Delft pieces, to ride the wave of popularity for Imari ceramics. But surely it is not 'famille verte', 'famille rose'; likewise not the 'jaune' or 'noire' versions; nor any other Jingdezhen (Ching-te Chen), and highly unlikely to be earlier Wucai and definitely not 'Kraak' ware (see e.g., Rose Kerr and Luisa E. Mengoni *Chinese Export Ceramics*, V & A Publishing, 2011, one of many good books on Chinese porcelain). But whether it be Imari from Japan, China, or Europe, in any case it was in all likelihood meant to symbolize the same thing—Renoir's interest in Japan.

To loosen the grip that stereotypes have had on us, a few examples are provided below that should give some idea of the 'unpredictability' of what was exported from the port of Imari, and known as Imari porcelain in the West. From left to right is **A**) Hizen ware (the broadest term, the name of the daimyo fiefdom encompassing Imari, Arita and what is now Saga and Nagasaki prefectures, in the past included in what was called 'Imari') 'Ewer of Chinese figures and flowers', made of "Kakiemon enamelled ceramic porcelain" (1670-90, British Museum) which also exhibits Persian influenced form; **B**) Arita ware 'Porcelain figure of a carouser astride a barrel', or more specifically a "Keg for spirits in the form of a Dutchman astride a barrel" having a "Baroque rectangular base modelled with scrolls"—a clearly European influenced design—and decorated in underglaze blue (mid-18th century, British Museum); and **C**) another Hizen ware, also of the Arita type, 'Bottle with Western Ships' (1800-86 [possibly older], Cleveland Museum of Art), a "Porcelain with decoration in colored enamels and underglaze blue, overglaze enamels, and gold", depicting on one side masted ships and the other side (shown here) of those travelers in a piece whose shape and designs might be characterized as 'Perso-European'. Yet all of these at the same time being very distinctive, possessing the originality and workmanship that was known widely as Imari.

'Old Imari' Ware

A) Ewer. Chinese figures and flowers, 1670-90
© The Trustees of the British Museum

B) Porcelain figure of a carouser astride a barrel, mid-18th c.
© The Trustees of the British Museum

C) Bottle with Western Ships, c. 1800–68
The Cleveland Museum of Art

Just as in the case of ukiyo-e prints, a constrictive stereotyping exists for Japanese ceramics, not necessarily just in regards to Imari ware, but generally concerning the astonishing multitude of Japanese kilns across the country during the Edo period. The breadth and depth of the craft, the never ending novelty without sacrifice to quality, sustained the allure of Japonisme, an attraction which waxed strong during Renoir's more youthful days: "from private homes to public spaces, the 1860s was an era marked by a French preoccupation with Japan in ceramic form", as Emily Eastgate Brink recounts in 'A Natural History of Porcelain: Jacquemart and Le Blant's Taxonomy of Japanese Design' (*L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 56, No. 3, Fall 2016).

Returning to our discussion of the vase in Renoir's 'Still Life with Bouquet', whether Delft, Qing, or Imari, in that age of Japonisme, it was most likely intended to represent the same idea as the fan. That it could be considered as such became reason enough to use it as a motif within painting, just as today certain things, simply because they come from, or were made in imitation of, a certain country, are displayed or worn in public—for Japan in the late 19th century, to use the lingo of modern marketing, was the high value brand. The following are a few more examples of Japanese ceramics, Imari and otherwise from the 19th century or earlier. And if there was one thing it was not that would be "bric-à-brac"—a phrase used, surprisingly, by major museums to describe Japanese arts and crafts such as those in Elihu Vedder's 'Japanese Still Life' which we discussed earlier filled with things irreproducible in the West at the time: silk textiles, a surimono album, gold leaf paintings, and a lustrous vase.

Oriental Ceramic Art, Collection of W.T. Walters, Section Ten
Stephen W. Bushell, lithography by Louis Prang & Co., 1897

Old Japan Imari Censer, c. 1700
with a scene of two figures relaxing near a waterfall
Plate CV

Japanese Hirado Blue and White Censer by Jake (ja-keh), 19th century
with globular fretwork and coiled dragons
Plate CXII

Tea Ceremony Ware from Imari and Kyoto

Vase, with lacquer lid for use as tea ceremony water jar, 1595-1615
Stoneware with iron and rice-straw-ash glazes, from Imari, Saga
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, DC

Honami Koetsu, Fujisan, early 17th century
Raku ware chawan (tea bowl) from Kyoto
Sunritz Hattori Museum of Arts, Suwa; image National Diet Lib., Tokyo

Photography and Japonisme

There is much less, if anything, Renoir wrote regarding photography compared to Japanese art. Even Vollard's 'intimate record' has nothing to say about Renoir's opinions concerning the subject, one way or the other. It simply seems neither Vollard nor Renoir was very conscious of it. Jean Renoir, his son, has one mention of it in the biography of his father, where he recounts:

> "Renoir regarded photography as both a great good and a great evil, 'like all inventions since the world began'. He gave due credit to Niepce and Daguerre for having 'freed painting from a lot of tiresome chores, starting with family portraits. Now the good shopkeeper has only to go to the photographer around the corner. So much the worse for us, but so much the better for the art of painting.' " (J. Renoir, 1962: 161)

From this it would seem the camera was a competitor of sorts to painting, but only for artists engaged in run-of-the-mill, purely memento-type realistic portraiture for the common 'shopkeeper'. This hardly speaks for it as an inspiration for artistic genius. All in all, photography was considered more detrimental in the balance, primarily because it discouraged amateurs from trying their hand at painting:

> "On the other hand photography, to my father's mind, was a threat to amateur painters. 'All those young girls who do mawkish water-colours at least get some idea of what painting is. To appreciate Mozart it does no harm to know how to play the piano. To appreciate old Corot it's a help to try your hand at a few landscapes. Photography is going to kill the amateur painter and, indirectly, the art-lover; and it may even kill the painter, since the art-lover is his source of livelihood.' " (Ibid.)

There is little here to suggest photographs were the earth-shaking artistic revelation that they are made out to be by modern scholarship. Given that if we scrape for evidence, we find artists such as Delacroix, Manet, and Frédéric Bazille used photographs in a practical sense early on in a few instances—in helping them execute an image already conceived; otherwise, we need to ask how much do we really have to tie the birth of Impressionism to the camera.

Photography at the time was not so much a precedent for characteristically Impressionist technique as it was a tool to be used quietly by painters, as modeling aids for primarily 'precisionist' works, functioning in much the same way as the camera obscura and camera lucida had already done for decades. In fact, there are plenty of signs to be found that in France photography was seen as, and may have indeed been, antithetical in some ways to the avant-garde vision. The vast majority of photographers relied solely on its power to convey detail accurately, and artistic results such as blurring were often a happy accident; artistry with the camera usually meant creating staged scenes for dramatic impact. How photographers actually spent the overwhelming majority of their time was conducting standardized, perfectly centered compositions for the public who could not afford portraiture painting, just as Renoir said.

Baudelaire made the harshest of pronouncements on photography in his essay for the Salon of 1859, in 'Le Public moderne et la photographie' writing "the photographic industry was the haven for every failed painter—too untalented or too lazy to finish their studies" and that this "universal infatuation" bore the character of "blindness and imbecility" (*Curiosités esthétiques,* 1868: 260); and that

> "It is time then, for photography to return to its true duty, which is to be the servant of the sciences and arts, but the very humble servant, like printing or shorthand, … in short let it be the secretary and clerk." (Ibid.)

This has been often recounted in recent histories of modern art as if quoting it absolves photography from the charges; for Baudelaire does sound unenlightened and old-fashioned—from our perspective today—but that does not change the fact he and many other arbiters of European opinion such as Lady Eastlake, including the artists themselves, shared that opinion. Jean Renoir recounts "a little play on words which Renoir attributed to Degas" which indicates Baudelaire's opinion of photographers was to a certain extent shared by the Impressionist painters themselves, in this case Degas towards Nadar:

> "It must have occurred as the climax of a conversation between the well-known society-photographer Nadar and the painter. The former was trying to prove that photography was superior to painting for giving a likeness. In the hope of putting his adversary in his place, Nadar had said, 'Don't forget that I too am a painter.' Deliberately affecting the accent of a roughneck, which made a comic contrast to his conventional appearance, Degas replied, 'Va donc ah, faux artiste, faux peintre, faux…tographe!' " (J. Renoir, 1962: 161-162)

Degas is punning faux [fake] pronounced 'pho' with pho-tographer; thus fake artist, fake painter, 'fake-tographer'. This is quite contrary to how Degas is usually characterized—as keenly interested in photography—but that was primarily later, when photography had made large strides from the early days of Impressionism. Jean Renoir, a film maker who must have been fully aware of the importance and potential of photography, would unlikely be biased against something so close to him, and is probably at least conveying what Renoir remembered as Degas saying. That Renoir relates it with relish and found it amusing was, perhaps because to a certain extent, he too felt it to be true.

In any case, one would expect Nadar then to be more central to the Batignolles group were photography considered such a font of artistic inspiration, but he is nowhere to be found in Fantin-Latour's painting of the group; and few are his photos among the remaining artifacts of the Batignolles members besides portraits he did for them. The vast majority of his output is like that of other photographers of the time—compositionally standard, centered portraiture, however skillful it might have been in capturing the persona of his sitters. Otherwise, Nadar's pictures were often staged and sensationalist in nature—publicity-seeking stunts or *underground* photos often using mannequins in catacombs or sewers—both of which did cause a public sensation—but not the artistic movement emphasizing the *plein-air*.

Photographs by Nadar

Mme Ernestine Nadar in a kimono, 1880–85
J. Paul Getty Museum

Self-Portrait, Félix Nadar, c. 1865
Smithsonian Institution

Second Japanese Embassy to Europe with Nadar's son, 1864
Yatsu Kanshiro, Paul, Saito Jirotaro, Wikimedia Commons

Above we have a few photographs by Nadar: in the center is a self-portrait as an adventurer and scientist, a completely staged photograph in his studio with a wicker basket hung from the ceiling and a painted backdrop of clouds—this after his spectacular crash a few years earlier in a real balloon; to the left a photo of his wife, 'Madame Ernestine Nadar in a kimono' (1880-1885); and finally, one of members of the Second Embassy of the Tokugawa government to Europe in 1864, with his son Paul (just one of many he took of the Japanese embassy), which we have added in keeping with the subject of this study. These of course do not cover the full range of his work, and some will say they do not do justice to him; therefore the reader is encouraged to scour the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Getty Museum, the Smithsonian, or elsewhere for Nadar's photographs and determine for himself or herself the nature of that photography. But why should we reproduce the same photo of his found in almost every introduction to modern art history or photography—Sarah Bernhardt enveloped in drapery like a Greek goddess? His photos may be experimental, at times original and with an aesthetic dimension, but they are not what can be readily interpreted as a model for Impressionist developments.

Nor for that matter, did the works of other photographers resuscitated from near oblivion such as Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) exert any verifiable influence—ahead of her time as she may have been; for we must then ask where are her pictures among the possessions of the Impressionists, how was she criticized or admired by them, or what correspondence referring to her exists. As Cameron is held up as a forerunner to modern art inclusive of Impressionism (e.g., *History of Modern Art* by H.H. Arnason, rev. and exp. by Elizabeth C. Mansfield, 2010 6th edition), we should look into this just a little more. Beaumont Newhall, in his *The History of Photography* (1964) writes that

> "Her compositions, undoubtedly inspired by her friendship with the painter George Frederic Watts, are for the most part costume pieces. She admired the work of Rejlander and invited him to Freshwater Bay 'to help her with his great experience.' Tennyson tells of the tedious hours of posing for the *Mad Monk*; her children are seen in such pictures as *Venus Chiding Cupid and Removing his Wings*. Without the challenge of interpreting great personalities, her work tended to become lost in sentiment and to echo painting." (Newhall, 1964: 64-65)

Cameron, Mrs. Herbert Duckworth, 1867, AIC

Cameron, Paul and Virginia, 1864, Google Art Proj.

Suzuki I, Japanese Woman with Parasol, 1870s, MET

In a perusal of her complete works as found in *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* by Julian Cox and Colin Ford (2003), what stands out are photographs that remind one of the Raphael's madonnas with child, Rossetti's compositional approaches, or otherwise scenes from the popular theater of the 19th century. The image of 'Mrs. Herbert Duckworth (1867, Art Institute of Chicago) shown above is one often included in art histories. Given the dark background and perhaps chiaroscuro if one can really call it that—found of course in traditional painting—it and her other works are tenuous as examples of precursors necessary to the development of modern art. Her pictures shown in such historical surveys are the exceptions to the rule regarding the general character of her work, and either way their connection to the artistic transformations in question is not apparent, despite their charm.

There are actually a few that reveal a Japanese influence: her 'Paul and Virginia' series (1864) has two children holding a Japanese parasol, from *The Overstone Album,* whose cover too, is done with a Japanese type design, very reminiscent of katagami stencil patterns (as a great many scrapbook and album covers in the late 19th century were). The parasol is clearly a 'bangasa' type of Japanese umbrella, unchanged in basic construction and form for centuries, and an example of one, though from a photo some years later in the 1870s, by Suzuki Shinichi I, is shown to the right. In Cameron's parasol, at the top, a part of the torn 'kappa' (頭紙) is visible, as well as the 'hajiki' (はじき) opening/closing device, the 'toumaki' (藤巻) wrapped handle, and the 'ishizuki' (石突) at the base. If not a bangasa, it is exceedingly close to one. And given that there was a large Indian population in the French colony of Mauritius (the setting of the 'Paul et Virginie' story the photo is based upon), nevertheless, rather than a sari or typical Indian garb, the more Buddhist-monkish looking costumes also reinforce the common associations with a culture further east (see also Lewis Carroll, 'Xie Kitchin with Umbrella', c. 1875, for another japonaiserie example of this type in British photography).

As for George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), the aforesaid influence upon Cameron, according to Britannica, he was

> "an English painter and sculptor of grandiose allegorical themes. Watts believed that art should preach a universal message, but his subject matter, conceived in terms of vague abstract ideals, is full of symbolism that is often obscure and today seems superficial." (www.britannica.com/biography/George-Frederick-Watts)

This seems to be a fairly accurate appraisal. The Tate gallery has kept its commentary online for a 1954-55 exhibition on 'George Frederic Watts' which says "his early painting was influenced by Lawrence and Etty" but his "real ambition was to paint large allegories" and that later, "the artist came under the influence of Titian and Tintoretto" (The Tate Gallery, 'George Frederic Watts'). Looking at his works, one wishes to call him an 'academic school symbolist'—if there is such a thing—but surely he is not the sort of artist that would be considered a forerunner to Impressionism, except in certain works where there is an ever so faint reminder of Turner in his skies. In other words, to say that Cameron, inspired by painters such as Watts, in turn influenced modern developments, sounds somewhat like a backwards argument.

And as for the photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813-1875), who Cameron invited to work with her, his elaborately staged allegorical and mythical scenes seem even farther removed from Realism, Naturalism, and Impressionism, and closer in spirit to academism and Romanticism (his portraits are quite histrionic to say the least)—just the sort of thing progressive painters were rebelling against. More artistically significant, but not a documented source for Cameron, were the French photographers of the 1850s, such as Gustave Le Gray, Charles Nègre, and Henri Le Secq—they chose and framed landscapes traditionally, though occasionally similarly to those found in Impressionist works. But all started in painting, sharing as a common teacher Hippolyte-Paul Delaroche (or taught in turn by Le Gray). Delaroche, whose canvases

portrayed French and English historical events, was an artist known for his historicism, conservatism, and Romanticism—thus again, an approach more or less antithetical to the modern movement. And once more we glean that photographers were looking to painting for inspiration, and it was the aesthetic of painting which led to better camerawork, not the other way around.

If we look further afield, across the Atlantic, at the Civil War photography of Matthew Brady, outstanding in its own right—possibly an influence upon Realism, but hardly a direct source for Impressionism. The same applies to the work of British photographers Roger Fenton and James Robertson in the previous decade recording faithfully the reality of the Crimean War in 1855. A few years later Robert Howlett in England produced some portraits in original settings; in the latter 1860s and early 1870s T. H. O'Sullivan, and a few years later William Henry Jackson, took some beautiful landscapes of the American West, expressing forcefully the textural qualities of rock and sand, but these too, are difficult to tie to the changes in art we are concerned with.

While Renoir may have had a somewhat blasé attitude toward photography, Paul Gauguin saw photography as fundamentally antithetical to the Impressionist movement. Often called a 'Post-impressionist', in fact he first studied under Pissarro, and was included in the 1880, 1881, and 1882 Impressionist exhibitions, spending holidays painting with Pissarro and Cézanne, and was thus affiliated with the network that included Manet, Degas, and Renoir (if not one of his friends). He was thus familiar with their ideas and saw himself as part of the same lineage, however much he has been categorized otherwise by later generations. Even in the late 1880s, even when photography had made large strides, in a letter to his friend the painter Émile Bernard—who had discussed issues of light and shadow with Charles Laval their close artist colleague—Gauguin clearly contrasted the inspiration received from Japanese prints and the detracting nature of photography:

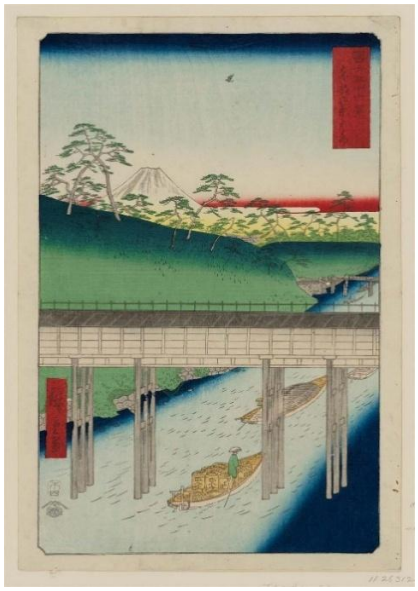
> "You were discussing shadows with Laval and you ask me if I don't give a damn... [implying 'well, I don't'] ...As for the explanation of light, yes! Look at the Japanese, who nevertheless draw admirably, and you will see outdoor life and in the sun without shadows; using color only as a combination of tones... giving the impression of warmth, and so forth. *Furthermore, I consider impressionism to be an entirely new exploration that necessarily moves away from anything mechanical such as photography and the like*." (in É. Bernard, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Émile Bernard*, 1954, Lettre III, p. 63, my trans., *italics* added)

And the key sentence in the original French: "En outre, je considère l'impressionnisme comme une recherche tout à fait nouvelle s'éloignant forcément de tout ce qui est mécanique tel que la photographie etc."

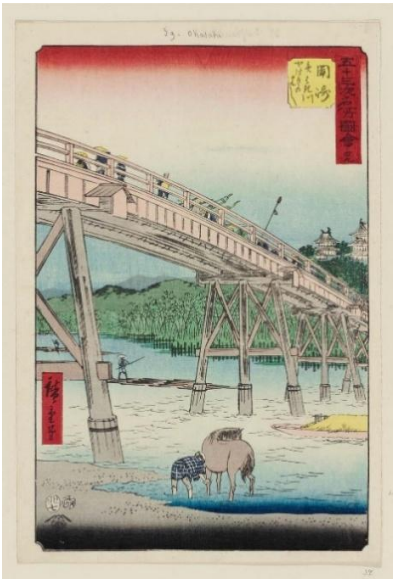
Let us take a few steps back and once again regard the situation: If photography was such a revelation, where are the glowing remarks by artists and art critics praising it to the skies as a font of artistic *inspiration* (of course it was heralded as a great technical *innovation* that might replace painting) as there are countless homilies to Japanese art at the time? Had photography's artistic quality been thus recognized, why are the walls of Giverny not covered with photographs of bridges and ships, and why instead with ukiyo-e prints of bridges and ships? Photographic influence sounds plausible more than it is historically substantive. The unadorned truth is that photographers in the 1860s and 1870s were primarily viewed as technicians, business opportunists, or 'wanna-be-artists' by the avant-garde, and someone must point out the reality of the Emperor's new clothes; and though no one dare say it, photography as Impressionist inspiration may be deemed in essence a 'substitutive' argument, whose meteoric rise in recent decades seems more correlated to the increase in verified cases of japonisme, rather than to any evidence of its own.

In reality, what we associate with artistic photography, whether it be aggressive cropping; bird's eye or 'worm's eye' views; wide angle or zoom; blurring, soft focus—'bokashi' in ink-wash painting; mid-motion capture; lantern effects; and otherwise, can be found in well-established, commonly used Japanese painting and print design techniques by the early 19th century. Sesshu Toyo (1420-1506), Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610), Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), and Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (1797-1858) are just a sampling of the innovative Japanese artists who were putting down to paper by the power of their imaginations what was to emerge from something yet to be born, to be emulated by many others in Japan before, and others outside after, the advent of that technology.

Indeed, from early on, ukiyo-e artists such as Shosai Ikkei (fl. 1860s and 70s) were depicting the act of photography itself as a subject of art, capturing the moods of camerawork in woodblock print images. For instance, Ikkei's 'Distant view of Ochanomizu from the Third Floor of the Yanagihara Studio' (1871, e.g., MFA) portrays a scene of photographic portraiture, where a woman sits quietly, obviously for some time, as the cameramen chat among themselves. In another print 'Kaiun Bridge' (1872, e.g., Edo-Tokyo Museum), he parodies photographers who have staged an elaborate setting, only to have a blind man unwittingly walk straight into their tripod—wreaking havoc upon the whole arrangement. Ikkei, however, is but one among several woodblock print artists who discovered creative opportunities in the social phenomenon of photography—demonstrating that characteristic Japanese openness in defining the artistic object of attention—a key part of the appeal of japonisme to the European avant-garde. Examples from other print masters can be found in the color plates of Ozawa Takeshi's *Nihon shashin-shi* (1986).



Ochanomizu in Edo, 1858
Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, MFA



Yahagi Bridge on the Yahagi River, 1855
Famous Sights of the Fifty-three Stations, MFA

Haneda Ferry Crossing and Benten Shrine, 1858
100 Famous Views of Edo © The Trustees of the British Museum

Above are some prints by Hiroshige demonstrating various 'photographic' techniques and subject matter. From left to right: a side view of differing bridge types taken from a high angle—observe beyond the covered bridge the second structure in the distance; an open bridge 'taken' from a sharp low angle, with accentuated foreshortening emphasizing the supporting elements; and aggressive cropping combined with extremely contrastive foregrounds and backgrounds.

Below to the left is an example by Hasegawa Tohaku of blurring or soft focus, what in suiboku painting is known as 'bokashi'; and to the right is an example of mid-motion capture by Hokusai, showing a man, a fish, and objects thrown up in the air from a collision or slip of some kind, long before Muybridge's images of galloping horses and somersaulting athletes.

Tohaku, Pine Trees, late 16th-early 17th century
Tokyo National Museum

Hokusai, *Manga* vol. 15, 1878, original before 1849
Brigham Young U. Harold B. Lee Lib., 1912 reprint

Furthermore, there are indications that photography as a self-conscious artistic endeavor, rather than a documentary tool, was influenced by the example of Japanese prints, as when the Goncourts directed the photography of their home interiors, or when Felice Beato (1832–1909) photographed Japan outdoors, whose compositions from the 1860s replicate or closely approximate scenes from Hiroshige's and Hokusai's landscape series.

Beato arrived in Japan in 1863, and was key in the formulation of the classic Yokohama photography genre, 'Yokohama shashin'—which became extremely popular among European visitors. In what seems was an attempt to approach the refined coloring of Japanese prints, he was instrumental in advancing the hand water-coloring of albumen prints. We have here an example of how traditional resources of Japanese art contributed to the aesthetic advance of a new technology; for Beato recruited former ukiyo-e artisans whose expertise and skill gave these images a delicate, unrivaled realism. Later, one of Beato's assistants, Kusakabe Kimbei (1841-1932), opened a studio in Yokohama in 1881 and later expanding his operations to Tokyo, producing on a larger scale, colorized scenes of daily life for export to foreign collectors.

Beato, House on the Tokaido Road, c. 1863-65
Between Yokohama and Fujisawa, Leiden U. Libr. (KITLV 89902)

Hiroshige, No. 33 Motoyama, 1835-38
Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido Road, MFA Boston (SC156764)

Beato, View of Yedo, Japan, 1867-69
Alexander Turnbull Lib., Nat. Lib. of NZ, Wellington, Wiki (5688989770)

Hiroshige, Soto Sakurada Benkei Bori, c. 1843
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Beato, Tokaido road in a village in Japan, c. 1863-65
Leiden University Library (KITLV 89882), Wikimedia Commons

Hokusai, Lake Suwa in Shinano Province, c. 1830-32
Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, MET

For just as painters have sources, so do photographers. There is enough here to indicate the possibility of early Western photography having been influenced by Japanese prints, or at the very least that ukiyo-e prints preceded the kind of imagery we often associate with landscape photography. The analogous nature of the images above becomes even more apparent when this page is printed in monochrome. That is to say, it shows once again, what are considered in modern art to be the effects of photography may in reality be those of Japanese woodblock prints. We see it in the case of Felice Beato above; less persuasion is needed here and it would be unreasonable to deny the natural connection and logic of Beato's having taken his photographs of Japan with the prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai in mind.

Next we take a look at a much earlier case of possible ukiyo-e influence. And that upon someone who never went to Japan: William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877), a key figure in the development of modern photography, known for developing the calotype process with shorter exposure times and the use of negatives by 1840, improving on the daguerreotype of Louis Daguerre. Though Talbot photographed various living subjects and inanimate objects, the things he tended to repeatedly take were focused on certain genres, of which sailing craft seems to have been of particular interest to him. It is here that we see unmistakable parallels to Japanese woodblock print images of boats, particularly to those of Hiroshige.

(A)

(B)

(C)

(D)

(E)

(A) Hiroshige, Tsukudajima Kaihin Rogetsu, ca. 1836, MET. (B) Talbot, Hungerford Suspension Bridge, c. 1845, MET. (C) Hiroshige, Clearing Weather at Shibaura (Shibaura seiran), c. 1837-38, Art Institute of Chicago. (D) Hiroshige, First Cuckoo of the Year at Tsukuda Island/Tsukudajima, hatsu hototogisu, c. 1831, Art Institute of Chicago. (E) Talbot, Ships in a Harbor at Low Tide, c. 1845, Zeno Fotografie.

This example is provided in hopes that someone closer to the pertinent archival sources will pursue possible connections between Talbot and Japanese prints. If the impact of photography on Impressionism, based on the deductive logic of structural parallels is to be accepted, it would seem that the same logic must be applied to photography itself, in light of precedents found in woodblock prints.

The critical parallel is not in the subject matter itself, but the distinctive, aggressive cropping and positioning of objects within the frame, and the viewing angles chosen, which combined, are unprecedented in lens-work and rare in painting in the West at the time. For instance, the depiction of multiple boats in close proximity; frequently viewed head on from stern or bow, or at a very steep angle; up close, with accentuated foreshortening; an emphasis on the masts or other extending rods; the deep cropping of the body of the vessels and/or the masts; and the depiction of a distant landscape beyond—all convey an intriguing sense of similitude between Talbot and Hiroshige. A few comparisons are shown above, but there are many more, often with these same characteristics. Furthermore, there is an aspect of mood, of ships quiet and unmanned, sitting silently at bay or moored, with a noticeable absence of human activity on or near the vessels—something Hiroshige repeated in variations on a theme, which Talbot echoes in his photographs.

This all goes beyond what some call 'medium constraints'—i.e., that small camera frames, for instance, would lead to cropping of masts—but which hardly explains why they are cropped in that particular way. In the examples above, certain boat hulls or masts are cut off and others are not. Why not place one vessel in the center as was typical in Western nautical depictions, with or without its sails cropped, and truncate the hulls of the surrounding boats? And how is it that the cuts are so confidently executed? In Talbot (E) for instance, the camera angle could have been shifted just a little more to the left, and captured most of the hull of the left side boat; but instead that vessel is intentionally sliced off. So too, in the case of (B): why not place the extending masts in the center, and why not cut their tops? Rather, they are intentionally set to the right, creating a similar asymmetric play of short and tall poles and cables/ropes as in Hiroshige in (C). From where does the aesthetic of extreme foregrounding versus backgrounding, and dramatic asymmetry arise, and why the choice of these scenes and not others? The 'medium constraint' excuse, quite frankly, is weak, and seems to forget that cameramen can take their tripods a few steps back or forward and pan their cameras left and right.

Talbot produced a good number of these images, varying them in a way similar to Hiroshige, so that in overall effect the parallels are even more remarkable. Though not shown here, one of Talbot's 'Sailing craft' (c. 1845), of which the original calotype negative is in the Science Museum in London, shows the prows of boats head on in an asymmetrical ordering,

with their masts deeply cropped—more than they need be—once again reminiscent of Hiroshige in approach, though the latter is still one step ahead in eliminating the entire hull of the craft in (D). Some of Talbot's other calotypes, such as his 'The Open Door', from *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), are not unlike surimono prints in their compositional approach, choice of subject matter, and their particular unassuming, rustic simplicity, best described generically as 'soboku' (素朴) in Japanese, and exemplifying the tea ceremony ideal of 'seihin' (清貧), or the beauty of a pure, clean poverty.

Of course, the question arises how he would have seen such woodblock prints. But in Britain, as previously mentioned, men like Joseph Banks had obtained Japanese prints and picture books from long before the 'opening' of Japan. Japanese prints were not just brought over by Philipp Franz von Siebold in the 1830s into Europe, but also by others attached in some way to the Dutch operations in Japan such as Carl Peter Thunberg (1743-1828) and Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812), whose collected materials were partially distributed in France and England before 1840, as recounted, for instance, by Deborah Jean Johnson in 'Japanese Prints in Europe Before 1840' (*The Burlington Magazine* June 1982, vol. 124, no. 951). Remarkably, ukiyo-e prints even reached New England, where works by Utamaro were carried home by James Devereux (1766-1846) on the full-rigged merchant ship *Franklin,* which sailed to Japan in 1799; this history was taken up in an exhibition held in Tokyo and Salem, Massachusetts: *Worlds Revealed: The Dawn of Japanese and American Exchange* (catalogue ed. by Edo-Tokyo Museum and Peabody Essex Museum, 1999). Indeed, in Holland, by 1827, Dirk Boer had set up his Japanese Shop, 'Japansche Winkel' in The Hague, where a variety of Japanese arts and crafts were sold to the public. See Marika Keblusek's *Japansch Magazijn* (2000) for more on this topic of a Japan already and always open to the Dutch as well as to visitors from across Europe via The Netherlands (see also 'The Intermediate Period' at japonisme.org).

Easier to accept would be the case of native Japanese photographers, as Beato's assistant Kusakabe Kimbei. A photograph by Kusakabe is shown below to the right, 'Youth' dated 1870s to 1890s by the Getty Museum, as that is the likely compilation of the album it is contained in. When he was working for Beato they were producing similar portraitures in the 1870s and it is very possible it is a work originating around then or a continuation of that style. Very similar photographic images were being produced in the 1870s by the somewhat mysterious 'Yamamoto' studio (e.g., 'Maiko', 1870s, Joseph Dubois Collection). In any case, next to it we have placed Renoir's 'Two Sisters' (1889, private collection), for whatever Renoir's exact source, if he had one, it is a juxtaposition worth showing.

Renoir, Two Sisters, 1889
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Kusakabe Kimbei, Youth, 1870s-90s
Hand-colored albumen silver print, J. Paul Getty Museum

Note the extremely bold chromatic demarcation of the inner and outer garments (in corresponding values though there is a reversal of hues) in a clear V shape in each of the pictures, of what look like twin sisters (or close in age with the sister on the left possibly slightly older in both cases), among other parallels, such as the slight angling of the faces in relation to each other, despite the overall orientation tilted downward to accommodate their pose of reading in Renoir's 'Two Sisters'.

It is evident from Kusakabe's other compositions that he often modeled his works on ukiyo-e print images: his 'Girl in Heavy Storm' (c. 1880, Old Asia Photography Picture Library), for instance, is a recreation of the classic and quintessential bijinga beauty in the rain with umbrella half closed, her skirt flapping in the wind. Kusakabe even reproduced ukiyo-e style rain by scratching long, straight lines in the negative. In any case, the highly analogous quality of the two images here suggests that Renoir may have observed some hand-colored photographs from Japan. Again we find it is the 'everything' of Japan which Renoir absorbs—whether fans, vases, prints, paintings, flowers, or photographs—if it was from that culture, it caught the attention of his keen eye.

Let us now look at another case of possible photographic influence upon Impressionist painting. What follows to the right is a photograph by Felice Beato, his 'Eiyama, Japan: thatched cottages' (c. 1868, Wellcome Collection, London) and to the left is Cezanne's 'La Maison du pendu, Auvers-sur-Oise', i.e., 'The House of the Hanged Man' (1873, Musée d'Orsay). If we pay careful attention to the description of Cezanne's work given by the Orsay, we find, what we shall rephrase here as the 'complicative character' of the composition, is similar to that of Beato's photograph.

As in the Orsay description of Cezanne's painting, we find that both images are characterized by several strong axes leading away from a central point; with paths which climb either to the left or right; likewise there is another path which leads down towards the center of the painting; also a bank or bank like formation curving away to the right or left; as well as the branches of the trees angling off to the top of the painting or photo. Among these axes are placed village houses whose coordinates in three-dimensional space also contribute in a similar fashion to the complicative character of the images; on both sides on different ground levels stand one house dominated by a thatched roof that is deeply truncated, and another where we see more wall surface with windows, though the placements of the structures is inverted. And in the center further back, we can make out only a portion of the roof of another building, as it is partially hidden by the intruding rooflines of the other houses and by small trees in front. Finally, Cezanne's "grainy" brushstrokes seem to reflect the texture of the 'kayabuki' thatched farmhouses and the "cool colors" of his painting are congruent with the idea that his inspiration might have come from a photograph.

Cezanne, La Maison du pendu, Auvers-sur-Oise, 1873
Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, image Wikimedia Commons

Beato, Eiyama, Japan: thatched cottages, c. 1868
Albumen print, Wellcome Collection, London (569384i)

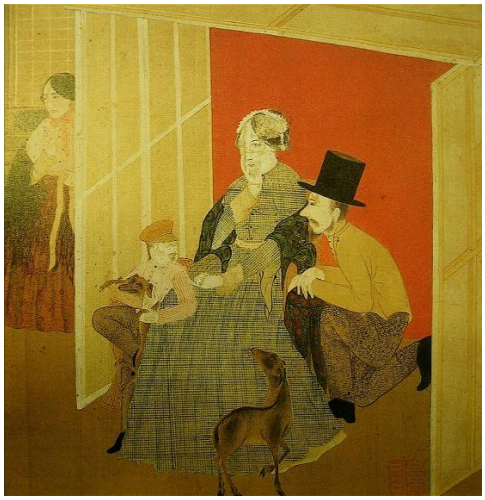
Thus, if we must admit the possibility that photography was an influence upon Impressionism, we can do so in a limited number of cases, but not in the way it has usually been characterized, and not from the assumed domestic sources. Instead, what confronts us is another form of japonisme, that of photographs of Japan taken by Western or Japanese photographers. We find an influence of Japanese print composition principles in them; but also we must recognize such landscapes did exist in Japan in inspiring variety and were representative of its geography—mountainous and surrounded by the sea, ranging in latitudes from central France to Morocco. We should credit those actual landscapes of Japan as providing the vistas that nurtured a unique artistic spirit and photographic opportunities, a factor underestimated in today's Japan where coastline and field have been utterly reshaped.

But Beato and Kusakabe are merely the tip of something much larger. We must look also at other photographers working in Japan, both Japanese and European, for further developments in photography as an art form progressing on a different path from that of the West. A strong interest in photography existed already in the late Edo period, and a camera was brought into Nagasaki by Ueno Shunnojo around 1848 after years of trying, though photos produced with it had to await Ichiki Shiro's portraits in the following decade. In 1854 Kawamoto Komin, who had, among other discoveries, developed white phosphorus matches in 1848, published the first book on chemical photography in Japan: *Ensei-kikijutsu* (Stories about Marvelous Instruments from the Far West).

Within six years or so of its publication, Ukai Gyokusen (1807–1887), considered the first professional Japanese photographer, established a studio in Edo (Tokyo) in 1860 or 1861. He was a merchant who, after getting to know the bunjinga painter Tani Buncho, decided upon becoming a full-time artist, and later learned photography (and probably bought his equipment) from the American Orrin Freeman (1830-1866), who had set up in Yokohama in 1859 or 1860 what was likely the first commercial studio in Japan. Ukai, however, being in Edo, worked for clients of the samurai class, taking over two hundred ambrotype portraits, creating a unique photographic corpus of artistic and anthropological value.

Gyokusen was soon followed by Shimooka Renjo (1823-1914), also a painter in Edo, studying under Kano Tosen of the Kano School. Having been shown a photograph in the 1850s, he decided to become a photographer, and when Yokohama opened in 1859, he learned camerawork from American photographer John Wilson (1816-?). Starting a studio there in 1862, he expanded his business to two studios, serving, unlike Gyokusen, many foreign visitors, but returned to Tokyo in 1875 to focus on painting. Even more so than his photographs, his paintings from the 1860s are filled with motifs and compositional qualities reminiscent of Degas and Bonnard, among others. These would not have been accessible to those artists, but they reveal how a Japanese approach to painting Western scenes results in an aesthetic converging with that of Western artists painting under Japanese influence.

Shimooka Renjo



Oranda Fūzoku (Dutch Genre Scene), Hanging scroll, color on silk, c. 1863
Museum of Tokyo National Univ. of Art and Music
Image Wikimedia Commons

Portrait of Shimooka Renjo, late 19th-early 20th c.
National Diet Library, Digital Exhibitions
Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures

Kowairotsukai (声色使い voice entertainer), c. 1870
Image Wikimedia Commons

By the mid-1860s his albumen prints of Japan in the form of the 'carte de visite' were being produced in good numbers and brought home to Europe and America. A sampling of Shimooka's hand-colored photos from an album dating to 1865-1868 can be viewed at Sebastian Dobson's 'Shimooka Renjo and the Japanese Carte-de-visite: Thoughts on 'A carte album attributed to Shimooka Renjo' ' (*Japan by the Dozen* at www.shashasha.co.jp/shimooka_album).

Shimooka Renjo's pupil, Yokoyama Matsusaburo (1838–1884), apprenticed to a kimono dealer, and from an early age interested in painting, was impressed by daguerreotypes of Eliphalet Brown Jr. in the mid-1850s. Perceiving in them a method to improve his painting, Yokoyama went to Yokohama and studied photography under Shimooka. Opening his own studio there in 1868, he relocated in the same year to Tokyo, and was commissioned a few years later to photograph Edo Castle and the treasures housed in the Shosoin repository, which were published in 1872. Some of his images of Japanese art were shown at the 1873 Vienna exposition—thus his work was seen in Europe. Yokoyama was the first Japanese to use stereographics; by 1869 he was taking double images of landscapes throughout the country, publishing at least three series of such views.

Yokoyama opened an art school in 1873 for painters and taught photographers such as Azusawa Ryoichi and Suzuki Shinichi, founding a photolithography company while continuing to paint, creating 'shashin abura-e'—'photographic oil-paintings'—where the paper backing of the photograph was removed, leaving only the thin light-sensitive layer that holds the image, and oil paint then applied directly onto that layer. Looking neither fully like a photograph nor a painting, neither quite Eastern nor Western, the results were somewhat novel, differing from simple overpainting as done in America and Europe. This technique was further developed by his student Azusawa Ryoichi who gained a patent for it in 1885, claiming to be a "Patent Oil-Painter on Photograph and Lithograph, and Common Oil-Painter and Photographer" (Bennett, 2023: 217)—and here too, the distinctions between technology and art blur, as they often did in Meiji Japan. To give just one more example of this sort of phenomenon, approached from a different angle, the woodblock print publisher Yamamoto Rihei produced a print series of actors, 'Haiyu Shashin Kurabe' (1876), where monochrome photographs of the individuals were inserted onto nishiki-e (full color prints), resulting in another kind of media fusion (see color plates in Ozawa Takeshi, 1986, for an example).

A married couple, Shima Kakoku (1827-1870), coming from a family of painters, and his wife Ryu (1823-1899), also a painter, led a transitory life, and somewhere along the way learned photography. Ryu's photograph of her husband of 1864 may make her the earliest female photographer of Japan. The two of them operated a studio in Edo in 1865-1867, placing them ahead of Yokoyama. We should not overlook the fact that all the Japanese photographers we have discussed thus far came from a traditional Japanese painting background, which naturally influenced their approach to camerawork, and we have plenty of remaining images from these pioneers to confirm their work was imbued with an aesthetic awareness.

And what has been strangely overlooked, and yet of transformational importance for photography as art, is that it was in Japan that a very high quality and quantity of colored prints was first achieved, hand-made as they may have been. These were ahead of the West in terms of artistic quality and naturalness—in Europe and America coloring often resulted in a sense of artificiality or garishness as in Carlo Ponti's 'megalethoscope' slide of 'Square and Church of St. Mark' (c. 1875); otherwise Louis Ducos du Hauron's 'Still Life with Rooster' (c. 1874-79) is one of the first true and rare color separation prints often included in historical surveys with very few others, if any—demonstrating the exception to the rule—and even here there is a harshness to it.

After Yokoyama, Usui Shuzaburo (active late 1860s to late 1890s) in 1867 became the second disciple of Shimooka Renjo. He opened a studio in Yokohama by 1876 at the latest, and in 1879 photographed the former president Ulysses S. Grant during his visit to Japan—creating one of the most appealing portraits of Grant ever to be made. In 1882 he accompanied British naturalist Henry Guillemard on his travels throughout Japan and the images Usui took were brought to England by Guillemard and are kept under that name at the University of Cambridge. Albums believed to include Usui's photographs sold under Adolfo Farsari's name speak of the high level his artistry.

Another who became an apprentice of Shimooka Renjo in 1866 was Suzuki Shinichi (1835–1918) from Shizuoka**,** famous for his delicate hand-colored albumen prints. He portrayed a wide range of social classes and professions, as well as producing captivating landscapes. Suzuki was commissioned by the journal, *The Far East,* to produce a photographic series documenting Japanese rural life (1872-73), and operating from his 'shajo' (outdoor photo studio) with an anthropologist's sensitivity, ensured that "scenes were expertly composed to document as authentically as possible the life and customs of rural communities." (Bennett, 2023: 171) It might be said of him that he combined both Realist and Impressionist sensibilities towards his work. Opening a studio in Yokohama (1873), he sold daguerreotypes, large format hand-colored albumen prints, and also invented a means to print photos on porcelain. Suzuki's photographic imagery was no doubt influenced by a familiarity with Japanese woodblock prints; and his landscapes, as the one shown below, are not unlike later photographic works by Emerson as well as certain Impressionist paintings in terms of composition.

Suzuki Shinichi I

Young Japanese Woman, 1870s
Albumen silver print, applied color, MET

View of Tagonura Bridge and Mount Fuji, before 1886
Hand-colored albumen print, Nagasaki University Library

Portrait of Suzuki, c. late 19th century
Matsuzaki Town Hall, Shizuoka

Again we see how photography in Japan has absorbed ukiyo-e approaches, not only of composition, pose, and the extremely delicate application of color (and notice again the large butterfly pattern), but also of calligraphy, as in the portrait of Suzuki, where the inscription was, it may be inferred, done with a brush in opaque ink on the glass side of the negative before printing—creating a marvelous design effect with the floating characters in white.

In addition to sales from his own studio, Suzuki's photographs were distributed by Sargent, Farsari & Co, and his studio was advertised from 1880 in *Keeling's Guide to Japan*—indicating that his photographs were reaching a foreign audience. His son-in-law, as in the ukiyo-e artist tradition, adopted his father-in-law's name, becoming Suzuki Shinichi II, and opened a studio in Tokyo catering to foreign residents and visitors, an excellent photographer in his own right, winning prizes, doing portraits of visiting dignitaries. It was possibly he who took the Hawaiian King David Kalākaua in 1881, and/or Maruki Riyo (1854–1923).

Much of what we have recounted and what follows can be found in English in Terry Bennett's *Photography in Japan: 1853–1912* (2023) and Anne Wilkes Tucker et al., *The History of Japanese Photography* (2003). Plentiful Japanese language resources exist, such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and the Hakodate Museum of Photography's *Shashin torai no koro* (1997), various surveys written or edited by Ozawa Takeshi, including *Nihon shashin zenshu* in twelve volumes (1985-1988), and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography compiled *Nihon shashinka jiten* (2000), to mention a few. Perusing such surveys one realizes the number of creative photographers working in Japan is beyond the scope of any discussion like this—in Yokohama alone there were ten Japanese photographic studios in business by 1881 (*Directory of Yokohama Merchants*, in Gartlan, 2024)—and we can hardly attempt to cover more than an arbitrary sampling of them.

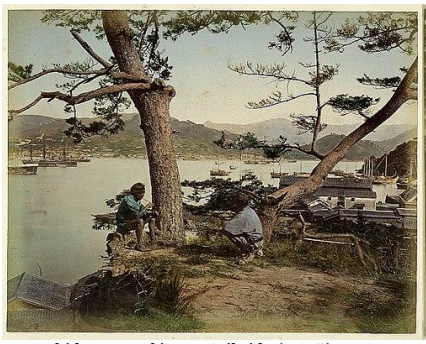
Introduced earlier was the mysterious 'Yamamoto' in Yokohama; his photo of 'Tea House Girls Taking a Meal' (c. 1870s, JCII Camera Museum, Tokyo) while posed, still captures a sense of the moment with great finesse and wit. Kanamaru Genzo (1832-1908) from his studio in Tokyo has left some memorable genre pictures, which skillfully convey the peculiar moods of his subjects with interesting setting details. Though we have mentioned mostly photographers working in the Yokohama and Edo/Tokyo area, by the late 1860s photographic studios could be found across the country.

In other major urban centers such as Kyoto, Hori Masumi (1826-1880) founded a studio in 1865, and Ichida Sota (1843-1896) established his in 1868, though later moving his operations to Kobe. Ichida's images are strikingly alike to ukiyo-e and Impressionist compositions, such as his large format albumen print 'View of Osaka from Yodogawa' (early 1870s, Tom Burnett Collection). In Osaka, Morita Raizo (1830-1889), and in Nagoya, Miyashita Kin (1837-1919) were considered at the top of their profession and prolific in their photographic output in the 1870s.

Elsewhere, in less heavily urbanized regions, the multi-talented Ono Benkichi (1807-1870), for instance, though originally from Kyoto, moved to Ishikawa on the western coast of Japan where photography was but one of his polymath-like activities ranged from publishing works on chemistry to the making of mechanized dolls; while Kojima Ryua (1820-1882) of Gifu (between Nagoya and Kyoto) opened a studio there in 1871, conducting portraiture with a raw authenticity expressive of that regional culture. In Yamagata prefecture, in the northwest, the 'kiroku shashin' (photographs as a conscious record of the times) by Kikuchi Shingaku (1832-1915) are noteworthy for their artistry in portraying industrial construction; and further north in Hokkaido, Tamoto Kenzo (1832-1912) and those he taught such as Takebayashi Seiichi (1842-1908) operated studios in Hakodate, just a few of many 'kaitaku' (frontier settlement and development) cameramen preserving images of historic figures and events during a time of momentous change; Tamoto eventually setting up a studio on the bitterly cold island of Sakhalin, thus becoming an early pioneer of extreme climate photography in the Far East.

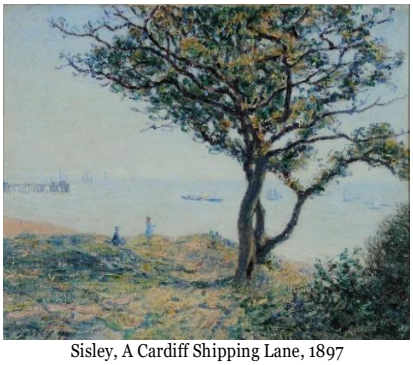
We shall pass over those working in the Kyushu area, such as Horie Kuwajiro (1831–1866), Maeda Genzo (1831–1906), and Tomishige Rihei (1837-1922), except to briefly describe the renowned Ueno Hikoma (1838-1904) who launched the first commercial studio of Nagasaki in 1862. It was his father, Ueno Shunnojo, spoken of earlier, who imported photographic equipment in the late 1840s; Hikoma himself was one of the first from East Asia to apply the gelatin dry-plate technology along with 'quick shutter' Esaki Reiji (1845-1910; whose collage of 1700 babies is astonishing). Hikoma's portrait of political revolutionary Sakamoto Ryoma (1866) is one of the best known pictures in Japan. He took fine portraits, landscapes, and recorded aspects of early modernization, and his work was exhibited at the 1873 Vienna world exposition. His success, shared with other members of his family, was such that eventually studio branches were established in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and even Vladivostok (Bennett 2023: 74).

We have listed these names for otherwise some readers might assume few creative Japanese photographers existed in that era, when in fact many did; and might we suggest the time has come for Western historical surveys to amend their 'sins of omission' in this area and elsewhere. To borrow the words of Anne Wilkes Tucker, curator and founder of the photography department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, "the nineteenth century photographs of Japan by Felix Beato and Baron Raimund von Stillfried are increasingly well-documented while the works of their Japanese contemporaries including Ueno Hikoma and Shimooka Renjo are neglected." (2003: 2-3)



Uchida, Nagasaki port, Saikaido (西海道), c. 1872
Hand-colored albumen print, image Wikimedia Commons

Torii and Lake, Honmoku, Yokohama, 1860-1900
Albumen silver print, image Wikimedia Commons



Sisley, A Cardiff Shipping Lane, 1897
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims, image Christian Devleeschauwer

A contemporary and friendly rival of Hikoma (often assumed to be a former student of his), deserving special attention is Uchida Kuichi (c. 1844-1875), who opened a studio in Osaka in 1865, moving to Yokohama in 1866 and Tokyo in 1869. Uchida was commissioned to undertake a portrait of the Meiji emperor, a sign of ultimate recognition, resulting in what are the best known photographs of the emperor. Esteemed by foreigners and locals alike, various eulogies remain lauding his landscapes in particular—Bennett calls him "Japan's greatest landscape photographer" (2023: 318). His panoramic views are striking, such as a finely colorized wide montage of Kumamoto Castle. Uchida's photo above to the left is only a fragment, one of four continuous panels of Nagasaki bay superbly aligned in perspective, the overall effect being alike to the classic four or six panel byobu or ukiyo-e pentaptych (as in the Kunisada II boating scene we saw earlier), and no doubt his eye for such pictorial opportunities was honed by such traditional models.

Shown in the center is the albumen silver print 'Torii and Lake', a view from the Jūniten Shrine at Honmoku, Yokohama (1860–1900, Smithsonian Institution, image Wikimedia Commons), likely to be a misattribution in open-source databases to Ueno Hikoma, and probably the work of Kusakabe Kimbei or perhaps Felice Beato. We have included it here as it serves as an illustration of the techniques also characteristic of Uchida's photo of Nagasaki.

As an example as to how these might relate to Impressionist compositions, a painting by Sisley referred to in the main text of this study has been placed on the right, possibly sharing the same sort of ukiyo-e sources as Uchida or the Yokohama photographer, or rather for the latter we should say what came from ingrained, visual habitude. In the complete montage by Uchida, the figures become more diminutive and the overall similarity with Sisley becomes more apparent. All three images display traditional ukiyo-e approaches to scenic layout, including silhouetting against the backdrop of an indistinct body of water from the edge of a ridge or precipice; of noticeably bent tree forms and their aggressive top cropping; pronounced contrasts of foreground and background elements, etc. Thus we repeatedly find indications that if photography did have an influence upon Impressionist compositions, it was through photographs taken with an eye to capturing scenes in an ukiyo-e style—in part, we can infer, to satisfy Western curiosity of the sights depicted in popular Hiroshige and Hokusai prints, and in part, an unconscious influence upon native photographers, naturally swayed by the character of woodblock prints they were accustomed to. It is odd how Western historical surveys of photography tend to overlook the existence of early camerawork in Japan, except perhaps including passing mention of Beato, when Western audiences were eager to see what that country 'actually' looked like during the Japan craze, and furthermore, when notable innovations, both technological and artistic, were arising in that country.

Mizuno Hanbei (1852–1920), for instance, invented the 'Mizunotype' by 1890, a process creating gold-and-silver lacquered photographs—in other words a photographic version of 'maki-e', where negatives were developed mixing potassium bichromate, gum arabic, and, surprisingly, honey. Upon this, goldleaf and/or silver were sprinkled, adhering according to the length and level of exposure (J. Marriage, et al., *Photographica World* 122, 2007). This resulted in captivating and literally luminous images, once again demonstrating how traditional Japanese craft skills fostered photographic artistry. Others who should be mentioned are Ogawa Kazumasa (1860-1929), operating first in Tomioka in Gunma Prefecture in 1877, who has been called "a pivotal figure in the history of Japanese photography" (Bennett, 2023: 210), and while his work is mainly from the 1890s, technically and artistically it was unsurpassed—one look at his colorized lilies or chrysanthemums should suffice to convince anyone of that. And the landscapes of his contemporary Enami Nobukuni (1859-1929) are truly breathtaking—these could be mistaken for those from more than half a century later. Though this is all racing ahead, it should be noted that Japan would also lead in experimenting with printing on silk, crepe paper, and other materials from the early 1890s (Bennett, 2023: 232), on the verge of American photography's great artistic transformation. We have dwelt on these latter developments as convenient within our discussion of Japanese photographers, from which, with one exception, we shall now leave.

We return to the 1860s, and direct our attention to Western photographers residing in Japan who taught and were assisted by a number of the hitherto discussed Japanese nationals. Beato was an early, but not the earliest European photographer to do so. One of the first was Pierre Joseph Rossier (1829–1886), who came several years before Beato in 1858, instructing several budding local photographers, including Ueno Hikoma. Rossier, having established himself as a photographer in Switzerland, was commissioned by a London firm to photograph China, but ended up spending more time in Japan, and his photographs of Canton/Hong Kong, Japan, and other parts of Asia were sold in England; some of the earliest known hand-colored Japanese photographs were done under his direction.

In the following year after Beato, in 1864, the Austrian photographer, Baron Raimund von Stillfried (1839–1911) arrived and in the 1870s was operating a large studio in Yokohama, selling hand-tinted albumen prints to Western visitors. His motifs, poses, and compositional approaches, however, are somewhat conventional, and unlike Beato or the mysterious Yamamoto, for instance, his Japanese sitters seem generally less at ease. Stillfried returned to Europe in 1883 or 1884, exhibiting his scenes of Japan, both photographs and his watercolor paintings derived from them, to European audiences, demonstrating "a market for such work in the Austro-Hungarian Empire" (Gartlan, 2024: 275).

Another photographer and entrepreneur coming to Japan in 1873, arriving via America, but born in Vicenza in the same year as Renoir, when it was still part of the Austrian Empire, was Adolfo Farsari (1841-1898). After Stillfried's departure, Farsari filled his shoes acquiring jointly with the Japanese photographer Tamamura Kozaburo (1856-1923) Stillfried's studio, and further expanding the business in the 1880s (Farsari acquiring a large stock of photographs taken by Stillfried, Beato, and Japanese photographers). Tamamura would operate independently soon after, opening studios not only in Yokohama but also Kobe, as business was good catering to foreigner customers who bought his colored souvenir photographs and those of Farsari. These included lacquered cover accordion-type photo albums—quite elegant works of art—which can be found for instance, at the Smithsonian Henry and Nancy Rosin Collection of Early Photography of Japan and at Waseda University Library. The latter's 'Yokohama, Japan', published by 'A. Farsari & Co.', cover with an "inlaid scene of a mother and her two children playing shadow pictures" (call no. HD 01955 0002), or the Fujiwara Hideyuki donated 'Albums of hand-colored photographs in the Meiji-period', cover with an "inlaid scene of two quails, a butterfly, and plants" (call no. HD 01955 0005) are a must see. Tamamura also received commissions from universities such as Cambridge and Chicago. Heated competition characterized this kind of commercial photography at the time, and exacting standards were demanded at the better studios, matching those of woodblock print industry from which many of the craftsmen came, as indicated earlier.

Though we cannot cover all the Western professional and amateur photographers residing or visiting Japan, one Frenchman who stands out for the artistic quality of his work—Hugues Krafft (1853-1935)—deserves a place in the front ranks of European photography. His 'Jeune fille japonaise' (c. 1883), to name just one, is a marvelous piece of Realism and empathetic portrayal. The vivid images of Austrian Michael Moser (1853-1912) from the early 1870s have been described as "particularly striking and full of mood", and possessing visual depth (Gert Rosenberg in Bennett 2023: 153), and again, like Krafft, everything about his sitters and his self-portraits shows that he deeply immersed himself in the local culture and was familiar with ukiyo-e compositions. Furthermore, he worked hard to learn the native language, even serving as interpreter during the 1873 Vienna world exposition. But whether local born or foreign, photographers in 19th century Japan may be considered some of the more artistically innovative of their time, applying the aesthetic principles and skills of traditional Japanese art to their work as artists around the world were doing in other media in that age of Japonisme—and though not recognized as such, at the global forefront of photography as an art form. The more creative Western photographers in Japan, who hired former ukiyo-e artisans as colorists, demonstrated a keen interest in Japanese arts and crafts, and invariably produced self-portraits in native costume.

We have reached a point in time beyond which photographs can no longer be considered a precedent for Impressionist developments, but we can however, discuss photographers of the mid-1880s and later as contemporaries of the older Renoir, and also as possibly relevant for the Post-Impressionists, but certainly not catalytic of Impressionism itself.

Among those whom French painters might have been aware of is Count Giuseppe Primoli (1851–1927), an Italian-French aristocrat who photographed street life in Paris and Rome during the 1880s, taking advantage of some of the earliest hand-held cameras to capture unposed slice-of-life Hokusai-type moments. His foreground cropping, steep viewpoints and high horizon lines, asymmetrical framing, and truncation of subjects at the borders are all classic ukiyo-e technique—but these sorts of devices had already long been experimented with by Manet, Degas, and Renoir, among others, years earlier. Nevertheless, in the 1880s, Primoli was at the leading edge of photography as an art in Europe both in terms of quality and quantity, leaving behind as many as 15,000 images mostly preserved at the Primoli Foundation in Rome.

Primoli was friends with Théophile Gautier, who, we may recall, along with his daughter Judith, were ardent Japonistes. Gautier advised Primoli in the arts, and no doubt influenced his collecting of Japanese artwork, which included at least 14 kakemono paintings (hanging scrolls) recently part of an exhibition at the Museo Napoleonico in Rome 'Giuseppe Primoli and the Charm of the East' (March to Sept., 2024). See Laura Panarese et al., *Giuseppe Primoli e il fascino dell'Oriente* (2024); and also Sandra Pinto, 'Giuseppe Primoli e il japonisme' (in Maria Elisa Tittoni Monti, ed., *Frammenti di un salotto: Giuseppe Primoli, i suoi kakemono e altro,* 1983).

An interesting aspect Primoli's interest in Japan was what we might call his social, or 'participatory japonisme', a description of which follows, if we may be allowed to quote the official tourist site of Rome:

> "Primoli had the habit of asking the guests of his living room to use the unpainted spaces of the *kakemono* to write written compositions. In the *kakemono* we can find, therefore, autograph compositions, signatures and dedications of famous French writers such as Zola, Claudel, Valery, Loti, Anatole France, or of Provençal poets, authors and performers of theatrical works, and even members of the royal houses of Europe. Among the objects on display also the fan with Japanese scenes painted by Giuseppe de Nittis in Paris around 1880 for Princess Mathilde Bonaparte." (https://turismoroma.it/en/events/giuseppe-primoli-and-charm-east)

Although Primoli was in frequent contact with the avant-garde in France at the time, and of course in Italy, he hardly comes up in surveys of photography in English language art histories, though he certainly deserves to be included. If Renoir and other Impressionists did look to photographs, Primoli's must be considered among the more likely.

Across the channel Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) was active in Britain during the same decade, and there too, we find photography follows, not leads, the changes occurring in painting. His flat, natural tones, atmospheric backgrounds and contrasting foreground details remind one of monochrome ink-wash brushwork, and compositionally, shots like 'Gathering Water-Lilies' (1886) which depicts two people on a shallow boat, one reaching out for a water lily, taken from a high angle, with reeds forming a backdrop and some plant forms peeping out from the edges in the foreground is so much like an ukiyo-e or an Impressionist piece influenced by it. Other images as 'A Rushy Shore' (1886) or 'Water Lilies' (1886) brings us back to our discussion of rushes in Hokusai and various Japanese paintings, or works by Renoir we examined done in the previous decade. In his *Naturalistic Photography* (1889), Emerson discusses at length the history of Japanese art, though keen to attribute its merits to China, whose art is discussed primarily in the context of Japanese artists; and he relies upon William Anderson's *The Pictorial Arts of Japan* (1886) for his knowledge of both. Emerson's cover for the photo collection *Marsh Leaves* (1895) is done in a Japanesque floral style, and the photographs included, such as 'Lone Lagoon' (1895 or before) seem straight out of what could be a 'sansui' (landscape) genre suibokuga.

Pictures such as 'Cantley: Wherries Waiting for the Turn of the Tide' (1886) and 'A Winter's Morning' (1887, Getty), among others, may also hark back to Dutch landscapes, or mid-19th century Realism and Naturalism à la Barbizon, and occasionally evoke perhaps Corot or Courbet—whatever the case, it may be deemed his camerawork was looking for guidance to the same sources as the Impressionists, and thus here too, once again, the idea of photography influencing Impressionism is somewhat of a circular argument, and in any case Emerson is late to the party so to speak, as his more original images arrived past the peak of Impressionism.

Finally, for the sake of perspective, we can state with certainty that during the later part of Renoir's long life, clearly in America, from the late 1890s into the early 20th century, it was photographers who also looked to ukiyo-e artists, or Western painters influenced by Japanese art, for aesthetic guidance. This should be noted because it is indicative of the nature of japonisme, that it was not something inherently more amenable to one art form over another, or accepted in one country and not another, but rather equally diffusive into all fields of aesthetic activity on both sides of the Atlantic—which we might find hard to believe unless confronted with sufficient examples from near and afar to our study of Renoir. Beaumont Newhall gave one hint, one sentence about it in his *The History of Photography* (1964) which for years was a standard introductory work on the subject, when he mentioned that American photographers such as "Clarence H White of Newark, Ohio, Edward Steichen of Milwaukee and Alvin Langdon Coburn of Boston" were attaining recognition through the yearly photography salons of late 1890s, and that:

> "The style of these Americans was characterized by soft focus, deep shadows relieved with brilliant highlights and strong, linear composition. *The influence of Whistler and Japanese prints lay heavily upon them.* They liked to fasten their photographs on mounts of softly colored textured paper which were in turn fastened to one or more additional mounts of harmonizing or contrasting colors and of increasing size. Prints so mounted were often signed with a monogram, and they were almost invariably exhibited in large frames." (1964: 104 *italics* added)

Nowadays, we would not even hear so much as that (e.g., T. Mulligan and D. Wooters, *A History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, 2026 or T. Ang, *Photography: The Definitive Visual History*, 2014). It deserves further elaboration. For instance, Edward Steichen's 'Experiment in multiple gum' (1904), depicting a woman standing next to an Utamaro print, is described by Françoise Heilbrun, then curator and founder of the photography department at the Orsay:

> "ce portrait est une profession de foi du goût japonisant de l'artiste et du modèle, lequel est encadré par deux estampes japonaises dont l'une clairement due à Utamaro, auquel Steichen empruntera beaucoup pour composer ses figures féminines." (La Réunion des musées nationaux, *Le Japonisme*, 1988: 241)

Likewise the influence of japonisme is present in Steichen's 'Cyclamen—Mrs. Philip Lydig' (c. 1905), and for his landscapes such as 'Farmer's Woodlot—Milwaukee' (1898) or his 'The Pool' (1899) which Charles Caffin discussed in a foundational work on the subject: *Photography as a Fine Art* (1901, 1971) saying the flatness and tonal delicacy of the work was possibly shaped by a Japanese aesthetic of abstraction:

> "It is worth remembering that the Japanese, whose art is the most abstract that we know of, founded upon generations of tradition and brought to the finest point of eloquent suggestiveness, include among their resources this of flatness." (1971: 158)

Heilbrun notes that Clarence White's 'The ring toss' (1899), 'Morning' (1908), 'The Orchard' (in *Camera Work*, 1905) is very close to Utamaro and the Nabis—the most "japonisantes" of artists (we might point out here the ongoing influence of Utamaro can be seen in Europe as well, as late as 1929, in Heinrich Kühn's 'Tonwertstudie'). While Alvin Langdon Coburn, through Arthur Dow, became "most profoundly familiarized with Japanese art" (1988: 244), as is apparent in his works akin to Hiroshige: 'The pier' (1903), 'Wapping' (1904), and 'Regent's Canal' (1905). Alfred Stieglitz, as demonstrated in his 'Spring Showers, New York' (1900), 'Snapshot from my window, New York' (1902), and 'The Flatiron Building, New York' (1902), utilized a variety of woodblock print ideas such as hashira-e formats, silhouettes in snow, elevated perspectives, techniques of atmospheric representation, and the like. These men were, in fact, just a few among many English and American photographers using Japanese approaches. They included "Frederick Evans, Frederick Holland Day, Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence White [discussed above], Constant Puyo, etc." (1988: 247) The heritage of Japonisme (as it had become by then) was introduced by the aforesaid Frederick Evans and Holland Day—whose 'Japanese Landscape', for example, 1910, National Gallery of Art, DC, requires no explaining.

The slightly younger generation of photographers, such as Adolf Meyer, the first official photographer of *Vogue* magazine, clearly worked with classic Japanese imagery in his 'The Shadow on the wall. Chrysanthemums' (c.1906); and the images of Anne W. Brigman, who owned Japanese prints of Kuniyoshi and Hiroshige, "irresistibly evoke Japan"(1988: 249)—among them, 'Paysage' (c. 1906) [or 'The Pine Sprite', 1911]; and there were those who went directly to Japan, as Arnold Genthe, whose 'Inland Sea' (1908) of the Seto Inland Sea Julia Meech Pekarik compared to a Hiroshige triptych, according to Heilbrun.

That influence took many forms, not only upon imagery, but also in the "softly colored textured paper" Newhall speaks of—most likely an unspecified reference to Japanese handmade papers—'washi'; but not limited to matt and fibrous types, but also later paper with brand names as 'Japine' were manufactured in the U.S., emulative of the smooth and lustrous surface of Japanese vellums. Alfred Stieglitz, like Peter Henry Emerson, used the technique of heliogravure (photogravure) on Japanese paper, and as The National Gallery of Art (DC) online article **'**Stieglitz's Practices and Processes' explains: "In the 1890s and early 1900s, when Stieglitz prepared his large carbon prints for display, he frequently mounted the print on a cream board and matted it with an eight-ply board covered with cream Japanese vellum." (Sarah Greenough, 'Mounting', 19 August 2020) This was the case with Gertrude Käsebier's well-known photo 'Blessed Art Thou Among Women' (1899/1900, platinum print [on Japanese tissue—this fact missing in the present description], MET). For more information on the subject see Sarah S. Wagner, 'Manufactured Platinum and Faux Platinum Papers, 1880s–1920s' (in C. McCabe, 2017). The monograms too, which Newhall speaks of, were in all likelihood affected by the vogue for stamped 'inkan' signature blocks in red ink and circular 'monsho' crests, widely imitated by artists of all kinds, as well as by major luxury goods manufacturers for logomarks.

American and European photographers at the time would have encountered photography of Japan in many forms: from the countless tourist-cum-amateur photographers as Emma Lasenby Liberty—wife of Arthur, the founder of Liberty's in London, the counterpart to La Porte Chinoise in Paris—who spent four months traveling in Japan in 1896 bringing home over one thousand shots of the land and its people. Or through the Chicagoan Elias Burton Holmes, who converted his lecture slides in Japan to hand-colored lantern slides, and besides his own photographs used those of Tamamura, Kusakabe, Enami, and Ogawa, among others. In 1893 he sent his first invitations to his lectures on Japan on Japanese poem cards, events which were oversubscribed and launched his career as celebrity 'travelogue' lecturer (Bennett, 2023: 258-259). He delivered over 8,000 lectures with Japanese colored images reaching wide audiences, and some 18,000 slides of his are preserved at the University of California, Los Angeles. An enthusiastic Japanophile, he described the country as "inconceivably picturesque, strangely and curiously beautiful. There were no ugly areas, no unfinished raw edges anywhere visible. All things Japanese were bound together into a satisfying mellow unity." (Ibid.) —Something one might venture to say with hesitation of the country today.

We have addressed these issues at length, for an obscuring fog presently hangs over art history; and only with the kind of contextual understanding elaborated above can we weigh judiciously the relative contributions of japonisme versus photography—and japonisme *within* photography—to Impressionist developments in general, and in particular, to the case of Renoir.

Afterword

Originally, a list of all the works by Renoir referred to in this paper was to be provided, with additional candidates for further research and discussion. Much has been left unsaid for others to pursue, especially regarding the Japanese prints said to have been in the artist's possession.

The author has quoted various scholars, often the more accomplished in studies of late 19th century French art, as to the Japanese-influenced aspects of certain Renoir works. This does not contradict the argument that for the most part, a silence has prevailed regarding Renoir's japonisme. Those scholars cited represent what is a brave minority opinion (concerning a limited number of his paintings); the vast majority of publications on Renoir, which have gone unmentioned in this paper, have not a word about his japonisme. Indeed, if one searches on Google Scholar and the like with the terms "Renoir" and "Japan", what comes up are articles on the influence that Renoir has had on Japanese artists, and none the other way around (in May of 2026).

Nor is this a fault of Western scholarship alone. While there is a 'Society for the Study of Japonisme' based in Tokyo (whose invaluable research goes mostly unrecognized), Japanese scholarship, at the better-known and more prestigious public and private universities, notably since the late 1990s, has come to increasingly 'toe the line' with the prevailing global outlook, despite being uniquely positioned to propose specific links to Japanese sources. Almost as if a counterargument to japonisme, there has grown what might be called a near-reflexive insistence on the influence of the West upon Japanese artists—despite this being thoroughly so understood, from the moment an artist in Japan sits in front of an easel and dabs a brush in oil paint. For of course 'Westernization' is a major theme of Meiji and Taisho-era Japan, permeating all walks of life, and standard fare of junior high school textbooks. And while the influence of 'Rangaku' ('Dutch Studies') during the Edo period is meticulously researched and publicized, the investigation of what must always be a two way process when intercultural contact occurs, that is influence from the converse direction, is left mostly unpursued in Japan in spite of avowals of "cross-pollination"; while the Dutch have at least produced exhibitions and publications such as: *Japanese Influence on Dutch Art: Imitation and Inspiration from 1650 to the Present* (1991) sponsored by the Rijksmuseum. There are exceptions, such as Miura Atsushi (emeritus) at Tokyo University, Yoshikawa Kazuyoshi (emeritus) and Takashina Erika at Kyoto University, Hashimoto Yorimitsu at Osaka University, Nishino Ayako at Keio University, and Yagishita Emi at Waseda University. There are more, but often, as with the aforementioned, they are not in art history but in literature, law, media, or interdisciplinary studies, and it is a circumscribed aspect of their overall research. For each of them there are dozens of others in the field, and in history generally, assiduously engaged in the opposite line of inquiry. And it is mostly the latter that reaches the bookstore and the classroom. If the primary purpose of scholarship is to shed light on the non-obvious, to provide something of scarcity value, one might question whether it has fully lived up to its responsibilities.

Whether East or West, the marginalization of japonisme works by 'admission without active incorporation'. In other words, if queried, it is claimed to be widely known, yet never woven into the mainstream narrative of art by those who say so, despite being critical for an accurate understanding of historical reality. For many, it seems confined to a separate mental drawer of its own; and few have a grasp of the documented extent of it. If we look at *Impressionism: Origins, Practice, Reception* (2nd edition, Thames and Hudson, 2026) by Belinda Thomson, one of the globally distributed series 'World of Art', we encounter the standard paragraph on the "craze" for Japanese art, and once again "cheap" woodblock prints (p.116), but in the discussion of individual paintings, such as in Degas' 'Jockeys in the Rain' (c. 1883-86), doubt is cast on whether there is a Japanese effect (p. 277); elsewhere one is at pains to find mention of that influence in his many other works covered; except once, and perfunctorily, in the vaguest of terms, as a secondary factor (p. 133). A reader is led to conclude that any influence was minimal and even that disputable.

If the Japonisme of Degas is silenced, then how can we possibly expect Renoir's japonisme to have a hearing? Not a single ukiyo-e print is offered as an example in this three-hundred plus page introduction to Impressionism; and naturally the word 'japonisme' itself is absent (as it is in other surveys for the general public—and this the case even for German scholars, when before they were at the forefront of japonisme research). Hokusai and Hiroshige are raised, but unlike the old European masters, never in relation to specific paintings. In stark contrast, the influence of photography is pressed upon us over several pages with examples; and yet, until a good time after the arrival of Japanese prints, the overwhelming majority of photographs were framed and centered like old-fashioned portraits and landscapes. Even the Bisson brothers' photographs, however advanced for the time, remind us more of Albert Bierstadt than anything Impressionist. The inclusion of L. A. Bisson's 'Road and Rail Bridges' (c. 1860) and Warnod's 'Ships Entering the Port of Le Havre' (c. 1859) as demonstrating photographic precedence is not convincing, and the reason why may be because there are few direct one-to-one comparisons of photograph vs. painting to be made that could account for the transformational qualities of individual Impressionist works. It is rather misleading to provide instead an artistic photo by Degas taken well *after* Impressionism's heyday from the 1890s (Thomson, 2026: 206)—often the same single photo across modern art histories.

And while photography might explain a certain facet of modern art, Japanese graphic art techniques can explain photographic approaches and much more—for the camera too (see Appendix) not just painting, ceramics, graphic design, and even cinematography (e.g., Daisuke Miyao, *Japonisme and the Birth of Cinema,* Duke University, 2020), came to follow the lead of Japanese imagery and compositional technique. In fact, while only an inkling of it can be seen here, japonisme was no mere stylistic episode, but a broad cultural phenomenon spanning half a century, to say nothing of the japonaiserie of the 17th and 18th centuries and the 'neo-japonisme' of the 20th and 21st centuries, and it may be argued merits closer historical attention analogous to that once given to the Renaissance's rediscovery of classical antiquity. —That perhaps sounding like a grandiose assertion, but back in 1977 an art historian could say—without a mote of hesitation—that this was how it was understood in Renoir's day; and with it an implication, more true than we might now wish to believe:

> "Certainly, Whistler mentions the Parthenon and Hokusai in the same sentence, but such comparisons were not unusual at the time. It was fashionable, even in quite conservative scholarly circles, to see Greece and Japan as parallel classical cultures and to believe that the Orient would provide modern artists with models and examples for their own work, just as Greece and Rome had done for earlier generations. This was the tenor of an article entitled 'Grèce et Japon' which appeared in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts in August 1890." (Whitford, 1977: 172)

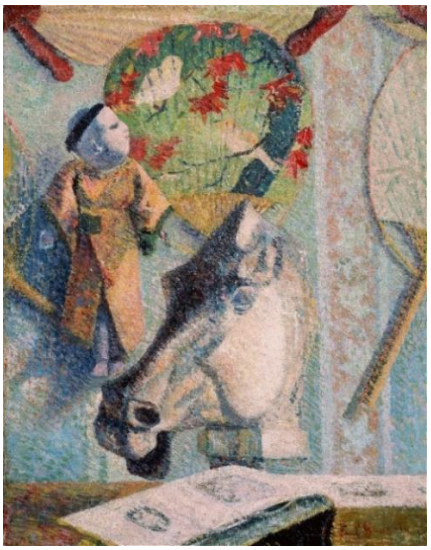
As the Goncourts said in their *Journal*, in 1862: "Japanese art is as great an art as Greek art." (January 1862, in C. Harrison and P. Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1815-1900*, 1998: 417) There was then an idea that across space and time, the art of Japan and Greece were equally authentic in their reflection of the life of the people, as the English painter Mortimer Menpes asserted ('A Personal View of Japanese Art' *The Magazine of Art*, vol. 11, 1888). And as Louis Gonse said in 'The Genius of the Japanese in Décor' ('Le Genie des Japonais dans le décor'), in Siegfried Bing's *Le Japon Artistique* (No. 2), which in the English version had been reduced to 'The Japanese as Decorators', so here retranslated:

> "Greece alone offers a comparable example of so pure and total an enthusiasm for the diversions of the imagination and the daily exercise of the aesthetic faculties."
>
> (La Grèce seule offre un semblable exemple d'un aussi pur, d'un aussi complet enthousiasme pour les délassements de l'imagination et pour l'exercice journalier des facultés esthétiques. 1888, No. 2, p. 14)

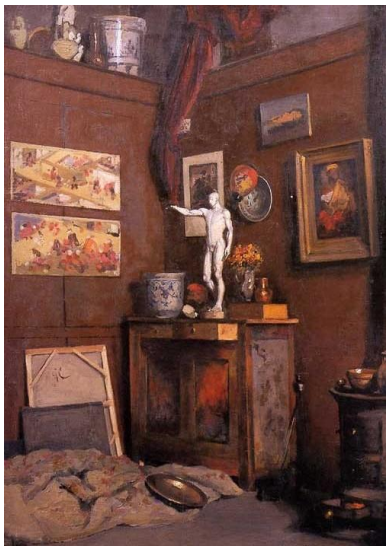
Whether historically true or not, it was true this was what was believed by many intellectuals and artists then. A creeping turnabout over the years has taken place; little do we realize just how our intolerance has grown for any meaningful deviation in Art History's grand paradigm, which finds only minor adjustments, that is fine tuning—epicycle recalibrations, if you will—acceptable. The convenient assumption is that the 21st century knows better about the 19th century than those who actually lived it; we paint over with our words theirs and their images. Then they understood "Japanese art is a powerful element of modernity" (Alfred Stevens, *Impressions on Painting*, CI, 1886: 22) and that, as Greece had done for the Renaissance, so Japan was doing for their age:

> …l'histoire du Beau soit complète déjà
> —taillée dans les marbres du Parthénon—
> et brodée, avec des oiseaux,
> sur l'éventail d'Hokusaï
> —au pied du Fusi-yama.
>
> Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le « ten o'clock » de M. Whistler', 1888

The beautiful is there for all to see, "hewn in the marbles of the Parthenon and broidered with birds upon the fan of Hokusai at the foot of Fujiyama"—and yet we are told otherwise. If we look at a painting by Gauguin today, 'Still-life with Horse's Head (1886, Artizon Museum, Tokyo) of a Greek sculpture of a horse surrounded with Japanese fans and a puppet, the meaning is deemed enigmatic. But the connection between the doll on the wall covered with uchiwa fans, in relation to the horse's head, a model of a 5th century Elgin marble from the Parthenon, should be clear to us. It is precisely the idea contained in Whitford's paragraph above; and a quite literal representation of it at that—Greece and Japan are to be conceived together; and as classical antiquity had provided artists with models, so does Japan, but as a living culture in greater variety.



Gauguin, Still-life with Horse's Head, 1886
Artizon Museum, image Wikimedia Commons



Caillebotte, Detail, Intérieur d'atelier au poêle, c. 1872-74
Private collection, image Wikimedia Commons

Renoir, Still Life with Bouquet, 1871
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Thus Gauguin wrote in one of his letters to Émile Bernard in 1890, that the "Entire Orient" ...[which Japan no doubt was an integral part of]... "is well worth studying and I believe I that I shall find renewed strength there. The West is decadent now, but everything that is Herculean can, like Antaeus, gain new power by touching the soil of the East." (*Lettres à Émile Bernard*, Brussels, 1943, in Whitford, 1977: 171). Is not the horse a symbol of power like Antaeus, set on the nurturing background of the East, aptly symbolized by the art of Japan? And does not the sketchbook in front, which is thought to be Gauguin's, represent the fruits of his inspiration from both?

We can detect a similar message in Gustave Caillebotte's much earlier painting 'Intérieur d'atelier au poêle' (c. 1872-74, private collection) shown above (with the floor and right side stove cropped for visibility of detail). A classical statue of a man or god stands pointing to a wall on which are two ukiyo-e triptychs; just above the figure's head to the right hangs a 'chochin' (a collapsible Japanese lantern), and another is close to his feet, slightly back to the left. As in Gauguin's picture, the symbol of the classical inheritance is surrounded by Japanese arts and crafts. Caillebotte's statue points as if beckoning us to 'Look to Japan'. In the corner formed by the wall hung with ukiyo-e and the statue on the cabinet, in front of them both on the floor, is a canvas turned verso and what appears to be a drop cloth to cover works in progress—the resulting art from the two sources of inspiration. Had Gauguin seen Caillebotte's painting? Perhaps not, but they shared the same idea because it was central to the 'Spirit of the Age', if there ever was such a thing.

Recall also, the Batignolles painting by Fantin-Latour (p. 25); as Sandblad explained in his study of Manet, the conviction of the Goncourts, of Greco-Japanese equivalence in worth and as heritage, is taken up and developed in that painting:

> "On the table to the left of the easel stands a classical Minerva statuette beside a black-lacquered Japanese tray decorated in gilt. But between these two works of art from separate cultural worlds a third, additional object has been placed, an object created out of a synthesis of the formal qualities exhibited by the other two: it is a piece of ceramic art with advanced 'Japanese' décor, made by the French painter and potter Laurent Bouvier... It is the same characteristic trinity, quite deliberately arranged, which figures, with slight variation, in Manet's own portrait of Zola painted two years previously." (1954: 106-107)

That "trinity" is A) Greece, and the tradition Europe built upon that legacy; B) Japan, which to Europe was the 'New Legacy'; and finally C) the ensuing fruits of that union; or if we may borrow from Hegelian dialectics, here there *was* a Thesis, Antithesis, *and* Synthesis. This trinity Sandblad interprets in Manet's portrait of Zola as: firstly, "Old Europe" represented by the copy of a Velázquez picture, secondly, the "recently-discovered Japan by a woodcut" of a sumo wrestler, and thirdly, "which is intended to represent the synthesis" and which "in fact partly covers the Velázquez print" and "lies close up to the woodcut, is a photograph of Olympia." (Ibid.)

Now let us return to our original picture by Renoir: instead of a Greek sculpture we have Manet's copy of a Velázquez (attributed) painting, alluding to the European tradition of the Old Masters, while Japan looms even larger in front, the fan in the vase covering much of Velázquez, thus Renoir going further than Manet before or Gauguin after in that assertion—with the pictorial composition perhaps reflecting a surimono arrangement (though usually it is a tall peacock's plume that stands in a vase on a scholar's low desk in front of a kakemono), in any case reflecting the asymmetric framing and cropping techniques from Japanese prints, and colors derived from the fan—indeed, the synthesis is Renoir's painting itself. Or as Gerald Needham wrote: "Japan has replaced Spain, and the bouquet of roses in the lower left reinforces the message." (*19th Century Realist Art*, 1988: 280) That message is subtly and daringly conveyed simultaneously. And this time we see it more lucidly for what it is; we finally understand it—and thus complete our grand circle.

Table of Contents

Renoir's Japonisme: In the Frosting and Filling of his Art
From 'Kogei' Aesthetics to an Implicit Philosophy of 'Wa'

Yasutaka Aoyama ・ May 2026, revised and expanded October 2026

Part I

Introduction: Still Life with Bouquet and the 1975 Cleveland exhibition 1
The Dual Kogei Aesthetic 2
The Misconstrued Artist and his 'Subdued' Works 7
Direct and Indirect Transmission 11
Kiln Effects on the Canvas Surface 15
Fusions: Porcelain, Petal, Pigment—and Complexion 18
The 'Japonisant' Batignolles Group 24

Part II

The Interlocking of Mood Shaping Elements—Line, Pattern, Layout, and Motif 29
Floral Japonisme 36
Brushwork Compared, East to West 42
Faunal Japonisme 49
Women's Everyday Pursuits—Macro and Micro Correspondences with Ukiyo-e 55
The Bijinga Ideal in Renoir's Vision of Femininity 62
Ukiyo-e Impressions: A Festive Society in Plein Air 68
Ukiyoe-Style Topography in Mountain, Valley, and Coast 74
The Logic of Resemblance—Coincidence or Evidence 76

Part III

Reorienting the Artist Eye and Hand 78
A Conception of Japanese Harmony within 'Irregularity' 79
Exemplarity, Singularity, and Necessity 84

Select Bibliography 87

Appendix

Motifs in 'Madam Monet and her Son Jean in the Garden at Argenteuil' 90
'Young Girl with a Swan'—images discussed in connection to Renoir's folding screen 91
More on the vertical stripe as fashion in relation to 'La Loge' 92
Imari porcelain styles pertaining to Renoir's 'Still Life with Bouquet' 96
Photography and Japonisme 98

Afterword 114

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The Japonisme Museum
Shogoin Sannocho 16-18, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto
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